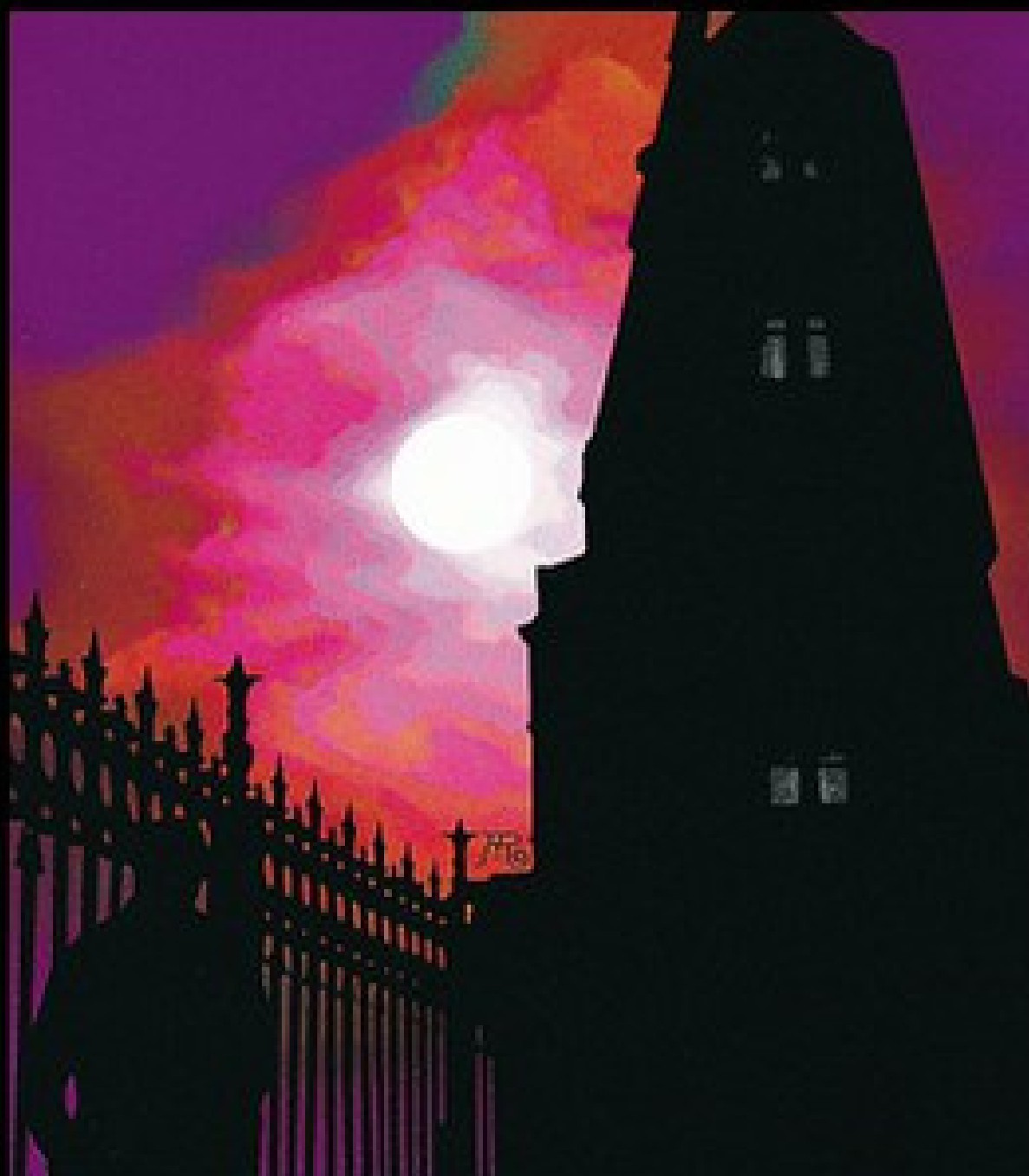


THE  
INVESTIGATORS  
in

THE MYSTERY OF THE  
BLUE DIAMOND





in

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OF THE  
BLUE DIAMOND**

Friday night, Steadman Museum, Los Angeles: Mr Peacock, the friendly but scatterbrained museum director, enters the building with Jupiter, Pete and Bob. In a few minutes, the three detectives will exclusively see one of the most valuable diamonds in the world—the ‘Fire of the Moon’. Suddenly, the lights go out and five burglars enter the museum. A short time later, Mr Peacock and The Three Investigators are trapped in the building. The burglars want the diamond and they are ready to go over dead bodies for it.

The Three Investigators  
in  
The Mystery of the Blue Diamond

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## **Contents**

- 1. 7:00 pm—The Daring Plan**
- 2. 7:46 pm—A Premiere of a Different Kind**
- 3. 8:28 pm—Power Failure**
- 4. 8:46 pm—Off Through the Middle**
- 5. 9:01 pm—Gotcha!**
- 6. 9:14 pm—Escape Attempts**
- 7. 9:20 pm—Eavesdropping Attack**
- 8. 9:44 pm—Confessions**
- 9. 10:03 pm—Under Duress**
- 10. 10:12 pm—Into the Lion’s Den**
- 11. 10:20 pm—Gotcha!**
- 12. 10:36 pm—The Secret of the Night Watchman**
- 13. 10:49 pm—Cross-Examination**
- 14. 11:07 pm—Nothing but the Truth**
- 15. 11:18 pm—The Confession**
- 16. 11:29 pm—Never Take the Lift Again**
- 17. 12:00 am—Revelations at Midnight**
- 18. 12:18 am—A Great Honour**

## 1. 7:00 pm—The Daring Plan

“Where is he? He’s long overdue.” Pete kept checking his watch. He had exchanged his bulky diver’s watch that he usually wore for his father’s noble model—one with a gold bracelet and hands instead of a digital display. It went better with the rest of his outfit—a black suit, white shirt and chic tie. The soles of his shiny black shoes clattered on the linoleum floor covering as he wandered restlessly up and down Headquarters.

Headquarters was an old mobile home trailer which served as the office of The Three Investigators—Jupiter Jones, Pete Crenshaw and Bob Andrews. This trailer was located at The Jones Salvage Yard which was operated by Jupiter’s uncle Titus and aunt Mathilda.

“Only five minutes,” Jupiter corrected him, sitting relaxed on the desk chair watching the Second Investigator march around the trailer. “Why don’t you give Bob a break?”

“Yeah, yeah, all right. I just don’t want to be late. This is the event! I’d be mad for the rest of my life if I missed it!”

“Don’t panic, Bob will show up.” Jupiter looked down at himself and calmly brushed a speck of lint from his black jacket. Suddenly, a familiar sound made him listen up—the rattling of Bob’s old Beetle.

“There he is!” Pete breathed a sigh of relief. “Thank goodness! We’re ready to go.”

But when Bob opened the door to Headquarters and Pete saw his face, all anticipation left him abruptly. With his shoulders hanging and his head bowed, Bob entered the room and let out a barely audible “Hi.”

“Oh, my gosh,” Pete moaned. “You don’t have the cards, do you? You don’t have the cards! Admit it, Bob!”

Bob nodded. “Yes, I don’t have the cards.”

“No!” Pete cried, writhing as if in physical pain. “Why not? I thought it was all right!”

“My father didn’t get any.”

“Why didn’t your father get one?” Pete questioned. “He works for a major newspaper in Los Angeles! They always get tickets!”

“Yes, but this time it was only two or three. And of course they went to the film critics from the cultural section.”

“Two or three!” Pete moaned and dropped onto a chair. “You said getting three invitations would be no problem at all!”

“Gosh, Pete,” Bob replied irritably. “Now don’t hold me responsible. Is it my fault that the production company is so stingy with its free tickets?”

Even Jupiter, who had previously listened in silence, could no longer hide his disappointment. “Of course not, Bob. Besides, I don’t think it’s stinginess at all. Rather, it is because journalists from all over the world have travelled to see the movie. After all, it’s not just any movie. It’s a new *Star Wars* movie!”

“And we would have been at the premiere by a hair’s breadth, seen all the stars and then drank champagne at the party with George Lucas,” Pete grumbled. “It’s something to cry for.”

“Then we’ll just watch it next week when it starts airing in the cinemas,” Bob suggested conciliatory.

“Do you think that comforts me?” Pete said.

“Or I’ll try to get tickets to the next Golden Raven awards,” Bob replied. “Maybe George Lucas will get a prize.”

“Then I will have to start again to look forward to something—which may end up to be the same,” Pete replied. “No, thank you.”

Suddenly, Jupiter struck the tabletop with such force that Pete and Bob startled. “We’re going to the premiere!” the First Investigator said with full of drive.

“Great idea!” Pete remarked. “We let ourselves be trampled to death by thousands of fans who stand in front of the Chinese Theatre to catch a glimpse of their favourite star.”

“I’m not talking about standing in front of the cinema, I’m talking about watching the movie.”

“Oh. And how are we supposed to get in?” Pete asked dishearteningly.

“We just go in.”

“Well, sure,” Pete replied mockingly. “I wonder why the other *Star Wars* freaks don’t do that in front of the cinema. Let’s see if we can get a seat.”

“I’m serious,” Jupiter said. “We just walk into the building over the red carpet and pretend to be part of it.”

“And you think they’ll let us through?” Pete asked. “Because we wear black suits or because we look like movie stars?”

Jupiter grinned superiorly. “Because we will come out from a gold-plated Rolls-Royce.”

“Ha!” Bob shouted and clapped his hands with enthusiasm. “That’s the idea! Jupe, what would we do without you?”

“Despair in all situations,” Pete said. “You mean we should show up there with Worthington? And you think that would work?”

“Why not? Do you think the bouncers know every invited guest personally? When three handsome boys climb out of a Rolls-Royce, they’ll be more ashamed not to know us and let us through.” Jupe turned around and reached for the receiver. “Hopefully Worthington will have time and not be driving another celebrity.”

Worthington worked for the Rent-’n-Ride Auto Agency. He was occasionally the chauffeur of The Three Investigators. Jupiter had once won his services for thirty days at a prize competition organized by the company. After that, a grateful client paid the company for future rides on the Rolls. Since Pete and Bob had a car of their own, they had only rarely made use of the Rolls, but there were exceptional situations in which a black and gold luxury car did better than a yellow Beetle.

Jupiter made a call to the auto agency and spoke to the manager, Mr Gelbert. He just needed less than two minutes to book the services of the car.

“That went fast,” Pete remarked.

“Good news. Worthington’s coming,” Jupe said. “He said something about a little handicap, so it might take a little longer, but he’ll hurry. We’ll wait for him outside. Also, in view of our short notice, he is only available for one hour. That’s better than nothing. We’ll find our way home after the event.”

“Hopefully handicap doesn’t refer to the car,” Pete remarked. “We can’t afford a breakdown now—the movie starts in an hour.”

“Pete, you’re an old pessimist,” Bob said, shaking his head.

They left Headquarters and stepped out onto the salvage yard, which lay quietly at dusk. It didn’t take long for a horn to sound from the street. It was the unmistakable Rolls-Royce.

Worthington, a tall man of indefinable age who never seemed to take off his chauffeur’s cap, had got out of the car to open the back door. He wasn’t surprised when he saw The



Three Investigators in black suits.

“Good evening, Worthington,” Jupiter greeted the chauffeur.

“Good evening, gentlemen, I don’t know where to take you yet, but your outfit tells me that my services may indeed be appropriate today.”

“That’s right,” Jupiter replied and suppressed a smile.

Worthington had driven them countless times and also helped them in dangerous situations. They had become very good friends. Nevertheless, he never lost his polite manner of speaking together with his rich English accent. Probably he only felt comfortable if he kept his form. But sometimes Jupiter wondered what kind of person was hidden under the chauffeur’s uniform.

When The Three Investigators got in, Jupiter noticed that Worthington’s left leg was thicker than his right. The black trousers were cut open at the side and a plaster shone white underneath. “What happened to you, Worthington?”

“This is the handicap I was talking about—a little accident. I fell off my horse playing polo.” With this he threw the door shut and limped around the car.

“Polo,” Jupiter giggled. “Is there a sport that would suit him better?”

“Broken?” Pete asked when Worthington had laboured to get into the driver’s seat.

“Yes. A very painful affair,” the chauffeur replied. “But luckily I do my job sitting down and I have been able to operate the clutch again for a week now. Where may I take you?”

“To the Chinese Theatre in Los Angeles,” Jupiter replied.

“Very well.” The car started to move. “You’re going to the premiere of the new *Star Wars* movie, I presume?”

“Yes!” Pete shouted enthusiastically. “We don’t have an invitation, though, but Jupiter has an idea—which hopefully works.” He decided to let Worthington in on their plan. Every chauffeur finally had a code of honour and a duty of secrecy. He would never betray them.

“Well, then I wish you the best of luck,” Worthington said. “At least I don’t see any problems with your attire.” Through the rear view mirror Pete could see him smiling.

“I’d like to be as confident as you are,” Pete said. “I’m not entirely convinced. What do we do if they want to see our invitation?”

“Movie stars don’t need invitations,” Bob waved off.

Jupe agreed with him. “The secret to success is to behave like movie stars.”

“Aha. And how does that work? You have experience.” Pete thus alluded to the long past career of the First Investigator as a child star on television, which he would have loved to forget.

“We have to look natural,” Jupe said. “It’s like all we do all day is go over red carpets to movie premieres. And just don’t look at the bouncers in the eye! The less we pay attention to them, the less they will dare to speak to us.”

Pete sighed deeply. “I don’t know if I can do this. You may have some experience as an ex-actor, but I’m sure I’ll turn bright red!”

“Imagine the cinema portal being the entrance to our school,” Bob suggested. “Just walk right through it, like nothing happened.”

“All right. That should be simple enough.” But Pete was absolutely not at ease. He became more and more nervous and a single drop of sweat ran down his back. Sweat stains on that white shirt wouldn’t do much good.

When they reached Hollywood Boulevard, Pete made a final attempt. “Shouldn’t we just let this go?” he asked. “We’re gonna get in a lot of trouble if we get caught.”

Jupiter and Bob looked at him frowning.

“You were so excited to go to the premiere and shake hands with George Lucas!” Bob said. “Now we are almost there, you have to play along with it.”

“Okay, I will.” He tried to smile. “It should be all right... I hope.”

Five minutes later, the famous cinema appeared in front of them. The building was brightly lit and crowds were gathering on the wide side walk. Only an approximately six-metre-wide path from the road to the entrance was kept clear by a barrier. Three or four people have just entered the cinema, followed by a flurry of flashbulbs and camera spotlights. Then the turmoil subsided and fans and journalists waited patiently for the arrival of the next celebrity.

“Holy cow,” Pete murmured. “We’ll never get in there.”

“Sure we can get in,” Jupiter replied with determination. “Let’s go, guys!”

Worthington stopped right in front of the red-carpeted entrance. “Good luck!” he wished. This time he did not have to get out of the car, because the nobly-dressed doorman of the posh cinema was already standing by and opened the car door.

Jupiter slipped out first, followed by Pete and Bob. Cameras flashed and headlights dazzled them. Some journalists wanted to rush forward to persuade the supposed stars to ask a few short questions, but they paused in uncertainty when they did not recognize the faces of the guests. Nevertheless, one of them could not be stopped from holding a microphone under Jupiter’s nose across the barrier. “How are you feeling tonight?”

“Oh, uh... great,” Jupiter answered truthfully and put on his best star smile.

“Are you seeing this movie for the first time today?”

“For the first time in its entire length, yes. I have already been able to admire a few scenes from the rough cut and am looking forward to a spectacular event.” That wasn’t a lie either—Jupiter had seen short excerpts on television.

Before the journalist asked questions that could become unpleasant, Jupiter walked on. He also took the chance to wave to the crowd before he disappeared into the cinema with Bob and Pete in tow. From the corner of his eye he noticed two bouncers, but did not care about them. As quickly as possible he wanted to cross the large foyer, which was already full of people, to make himself invisible in a dark corner.

“We made it!” he whispered happily to his friends.

Just as he had said the last word, a heavy hand lay on his shoulder. “Excuse me, sir. May I see your invitation, please?”

## 2. 7:46 pm—A Premiere of a Different Kind

How rooted Jupiter stopped. Stay cool!—it shot through his head. As quietly as possible, he turned around and looked directly into a bouncer in a shirt and jacket, towering over him by more than one head. Darkly two small eyes looked down on him in a broad face.

“I have no invitation,” Jupiter said casually. “I am here at the express request of a friend.”

“And who is this friend, may I ask?” The man didn’t make a face.

“Pete Crenshaw. He’s standing next to you.” Jupiter pointed to the Second Investigator, who was pale to death on the spot and stared at Jupiter in horror.

“I...” he started stuttering, but then he noticed Juve’s warning look and kept his mouth shut.

“His father works in the movies,” Jupiter told the bouncer. It was true, Pete’s father was an expert on special effects at a large film studio. But he had nothing to do with this production.

“And what is your father’s name?” the man turned to Pete.

“Henry Crenshaw.”

“Wait a minute.” He reached into his inside pocket and pulled out a guest list. “The name is not listed here.”

“Well, he can’t come either, unfortunately, because he has other urgent obligations,” Pete replied, thinking that his parents wanted to go out tonight.

“I’m sorry, but without a written invitation, I must ask you to leave.”

“But my father wanted us to be here tonight. I don’t know why he’s not on your list.”

“Wait a minute!” The man left them standing there and walked up to a group of people in evening dress who were in one corner of the foyer.

“The opportunity to slip into the movie theatre,” Bob whispered.

“Better not,” Jupiter warned. “Otherwise there’ll be trouble.”

The bouncer approached a man who shook his head shortly afterwards and turned to the other guests again.

“That... that is George Lucas!” Pete, who had recognized the man, hissed. “Damn it, that’s it, then.”

Pete was right. “Mr Lucas does not know a Mr Henry Crenshaw,” the bouncer said angrily. “Now get out of here!”

He grabbed Jupiter roughly by the arm and pulled him to a small door. Behind it lay a shabby stairwell. The man directed them down the stairs to another steel door. He ripped the door open and pushed Jupiter out into a small, dark alley. Bob and Pete followed him quickly without saying a word.

“Don’t try that again! Next time I’ll call the police,” the man hissed and slammed the door furiously. The door didn’t have a handle on the outside.

The three looked at each other for a few seconds.

Then Pete’s face darkened. “Sure we can get in, Pete. No problem at all, Pete. You just have to take it easy, Pete. So, that worked out really well!”

“Now don’t be unfair,” Bob said. “Jupe’s idea was good. It didn’t work doesn’t mean it’s his fault.”

“We’re lucky he didn’t call the police,” Pete said. “Or perhaps the appearance of the police would not do well at a movie premiere.”

“So,” mumbled Jupiter, crumpled up, “it didn’t go very well.”

Bob was the first to find his humour again. “But it was great that you gave the reporter a quick interview, Jupe. I couldn’t have done that.”

“He asked me a question, so I gave an answer,” grinned the First Investigator.

“What do we do now?” Pete asked helplessly as they strolled towards Hollywood Boulevard. “Are we going to stand stupidly around here?”

“We could still go see some celebrities,” Bob suggested.

“Absolutely not!” Pete protested. “Maybe some people there at the entrance recognized us earlier. Then they either want autographs or they want to understand what happened and then laugh at us.”

“All right,” Jupe relented so as not to make Pete angrier. “We’re going home... Sort of.”

When they reached an intersection, they moved as quickly as possible away from the crowd that was still standing at the entrance of the cinema.

Suddenly a car stopped right next to them. The golden body flashed and the window was rolled down. “May I drive these gentlemen home?”

“Worthington!” Bob yelled. “You’re still around!”

“I thought it would be better to wait a few minutes to make sure that your project was actually a success.”

Pete breathed a sigh of relief. “That was a great idea, Worthington.”

He didn’t wait until the chauffeur got out, but opened the door himself and let himself fall onto the spacious and comfortable seat. Worthington didn’t ask any questions and The Three Investigators didn’t want to talk about their slip-up. There was silence in the first five minutes of the journey.

Then the car phone beeped. Worthington answered and exchanged a few words. He half turned to them and said: “Sorry, it’s not appropriate to interrupt a journey, but it’s an emergency. Would it bother you to take a little detour and make room for another passenger?”

Jupiter looked briefly at his friends. “No, of course not, Worthington, if it’s an emergency.”

“Thank you very much.” Then, quieter, he spoke into the receiver, “I’ll be with you in a few minutes, Mr Peacock.” He turned off the phone. “Mr Peacock is the director of the Steadman Museum and one of my regular passengers. I don’t know what it’s about, but he says it’s urgent.”

“The Steadman Museum?” Jupiter was thinking. “There’s gonna be this exhibition opening soon. For a few weeks you will be able to see one of the most famous gems in the world—the Blue Diamond, which is also known as the ‘Fire of the Moon’.”

“Tomorrow,” Bob corrected. “Tomorrow is the opening. There are posters all over the city.”

Worthington nodded. “I assume that’s what this is about. There are probably last-minute preparations to be made.”

“And the director can’t drive his own car?” Pete mumbled so quietly that nobody heard him.

Worthington drove out of downtown, heading for Beverly Hills. It was already dark when he turned off shortly before the noble district and drove through a quiet street.

The chauffeur stopped in front of a house that could hardly be seen behind the front garden that was completely overgrown with plants. A small, very plump man with a bald head and bulging lips ran through the driveway towards the Rolls-Royce and tore open the back door before Worthington even had a chance to get out.

"Don't bother, Worthington. Stay seated," he said frantically. Only now did he notice the three detectives. "Oh, excuse me. I didn't mean to interrupt your journey. I'm really very sorry. It's the first time you've ever riding in a car this fancy, isn't it? May I?" As he was trying to squeeze through the door but immediately slipped and fell.

"Not at all, sir," Bob replied and could hardly resist a laugh as Mr Peacock slipped. "In fact, we ride in this car a lot. Uh... can we help you in any way?"

"I've lost something, yes, lost. My personal organizer—a Filofax, a calendar, a notebook, you know? I must have left it here in the car earlier today. Worthington, did you happen to see my Filofax, by any chance?"

"I'm sorry, sir. No, and since noon today, I have not driven anybody in this car."

"May I?" Mr Peacock groaned and shoved himself past Pete to the mini-bar. But, as expected, there were only drinks and glasses in it. There was also no personal organizer in the compartment for the radio telephone, nor under the seats or between the cushions. While Mr Peacock was searching, Bob made room by getting out and moved to the front passenger seat.

Panting and exhausted, Mr Peacock let himself sink into the seat next to Pete. He pulled a handkerchief out of his pocket and dabbed it on his forehead.

"Too stupid. Then it should still be in the office. I, uh, I really need to get there. Really urgent." He smiled apologetically. "I'm only half a person without my personal organizer. It's my whole life, so to speak. Anyway, everything to do with names, numbers and dates. And I really need to call some people about the exhibition opening tomorrow, you know. Oh!" He twitched. "I haven't even introduced myself. Peacock. James Peacock, director of the Steadman Museum." He stretched out his hand, but didn't know who to hand it to first until Jupiter came to his aid and just grabbed it.

"Jupiter Jones. And these are my friends Pete Crenshaw and Bob Andrews."

"I don't mind making a little detour to the museum," Bob said over his shoulder. "Provided you have no objection to us accompanying you."

"Oh, not at all, not at all. It would be very nice of you to interrupt your journey for me," Mr Peacock said. "Worthington, to the Steadman Museum, please!"

"Very well, sir," the chauffeur replied. Through the rear view mirror he blinked at Jupiter.

During the ride, Mr Peacock, who had poured himself a drink, spoke without a period or comma—about his personal organizer, about the exhibition and about the gemstone.

"The diamond belongs to an Arab oil sheikh. It's a great honour for us to have it in the museum for a few weeks. The visitors will stream into the exhibition like crazy, endless crowds, and that's going to be huge for us!"

"After all, the 'Fire of the Moon' is one of the most precious diamonds in the world. It is a massive 437 carats, yes! By the way, it has the name because of its blue colour and its luminescent properties. If you illuminate it strongly, it absorbs the light and then shimmers slightly out of itself. That is very rare with diamonds, tremendously rare, which is why it is so valuable. Would you like to take a look at it?"

The Three Investigators had listened to Mr Peacock with only half an ear, so this direct question surprised them somewhat.

"Yes, we'd love to," Pete said quickly. "Can we do that?"

“Well, I have to go to my office at the museum anyway. I just hope I actually left my organizer there. We’ll see. I can show you the diamond too. Of course it’s not allowed, but after all, I am the director.” He smiled conspiratorially at them. “This would be a premiere. You’ll be the first visitors to the Steadman Museum to see the ‘Fire of the Moon’.”

“At least we’d get to one premiere,” Pete said. He hadn’t forgotten his anger at their unsuccessful visit to the cinema, but the unexpected twist the evening had taken made him feel a little more conciliatory.

After twenty minutes, they were back in downtown Los Angeles. Worthington parked the Rolls on the almost deserted parking lot of the museum and his passengers got out.

“Wouldn’t you like to come with us, Worthington?” Mr Peacock suggested. “Or are you not interested in diamonds?”

“Of course, I’d love to accompany you if you’d accept my reduced pace.”

“Of course. Come on, come on.” For a change, Mr Peacock held the door open for his chauffeur. Together they walked or hobbled towards the building.

The museum was a modern, multi-storey building made of glass, steel and concrete, surrounded by a tiny park that shielded it a little from the street. The Three Investigators and Worthington followed Mr Peacock to a small side entrance that the director opened with a security key.

After all of them entered, Mr Peacock locked the door. “Now I have thirty seconds to deactivate the security alarm,” he explained and went to a small box on the wall of the bare stairwell. With another key attached to his thick waistband, he opened the box and bent over a small keypad to key in the secret code. A beep and a green light assured him that the alarm was deactivated.

“It’s the only number I can remember without my personal organizer,” he said smiling, “otherwise the police would be here in no time.”

He opened another door that led directly to the entrance hall of the museum. The sparse emergency lighting provided more shade than light, but it was enough to recognize the most important thing—a huge dinosaur skeleton that looked down on them coldly and scarily.

“Diplodocus,” Jupiter stated expertly. “A herbivore that lived at the end of the Jurassic period.”

While Bob and Pete only twisted their eyes, Mr Peacock laughed with delight. “Aha, an expert, yes. I like that. All right, come on. The Blue Diamond is on the third floor. We have to go all the way up to my office anyway.”

He turned to the wide staircase leading to the first floor. “If you want, I can show you some other treasures. But don’t touch anything! The security alarm system I turned off just now was intended only for the entrances and exits. The valuable exhibits have their own security system.”

“Excuse me, Mr Peacock,” Worthington spoke and pointed to his cast leg. “I’m afraid I won’t be able to accompany you. Climbing stairs isn’t exactly easy for me right now.”

“Oh, no problem. No problem at all! Let’s just take the lift! Or do you want to look at some other things, my young friends?”

“I wouldn’t mind a little night tour,” Bob confessed and Pete nodded in agreement.

“All right. We’ll walk and I’ll show you some treasures while Worthington takes the lift over there! Meet us at the third floor!”

Worthington nodded gratefully and made his way to the double door of the lift. “I’ll go with you, Worthington,” Jupiter said.

“Don’t you want to look around, Juve?” Pete asked.

“Yes, I do. But I take the other way around—from top to bottom. That way I don’t have to climb up the stairs.”

“So you’ll never get rid of your excess pounds,” Pete mocked and bit his lips a moment later when he remembered Mr Peacock’s figure, which far surpassed Jupiter’s.

But the director did not seem to have heard Pete’s remark or he just ignored it. “But don’t touch anything!” He warned once again and climbed the first steps of the staircase while Jupiter and Worthington got into the lift and went up.

Mr Peacock, Bob and Pete had just reached the first landing when suddenly the lights went out.

### 3. 8:28 pm—Power Failure

“What’s happening?” Pete asked, startled in the dark. “Does this have something to do with the alarm system?” No one answered.

“Mr Peacock?” Pete said.

“Somebody’s here!” Mr Peacock gasped. “Somebody’s here!”

“What do you mean?” Bob cried. “It could just be that the power went out.”

“Shh!” hissed the museum director. “The power doesn’t just go out here! That’s out of the question! That’s impossible! Somebody’s in this building!”

“But how...” Pete began.

“I don’t know! I have to go to the security office and turn the power back on!”

“The ‘Fire of the Moon’!” cried Pete. “Perhaps somebody’s trying to steal the Blue Diamond!”

“Quiet!” Bob whispered. “Do you want a hundred people to show up here?”

“I’m going into the security office,” Mr Peacock decided. “One of you must watch the ‘Fire of the Moon’!”

“I’ll do it,” Pete decided. “Bob, you go with Mr Peacock.”

Some light fell through the high windows and a shaft next to the stairs. Once their eyes had become accustomed to the dim light, and they managed to proceed up the stairs together. Mr Peacock quickly began to sweat and gasp like an old steam engine. Bob had to follow him as he didn’t know where the security office was.

Pete sprinted off without waiting for them. When he reached the third floor, he hurried down the main hall. It was barely enough light to find his way around. Signs, only vaguely recognizable in the darkness, showed him the way to the special exhibition. He crossed the spacious Art Gallery, which was bathed in pale grey by the large skylight and the dull laminate floor.

Bizarre sculptures lined the middle corridor like guards to keep unwanted intruders away. There were no corners here—no hidden corners he could slip into if need be. In this hall, if criminals appeared, he would be at their mercy. Pete’s shoes clattered on the floor. He felt watched and was happy when he left the hall.

Now he was in a maze of corridors, which were delimited by partitions, glass showcases and exhibits. The carpet-lined floor swallowed almost every sound. Suddenly he saw some shadows from the corner of his eye. He stood rooted to the ground. To his left, a few metres away, stood half a dozen shadowy-black figures staring motionlessly in his direction.

They must have seen him!—Pete thought. But why didn’t they do anything? Why did they just stand there in silence? Suddenly he had a suspicion. He walked slowly towards the people and laughed quietly. They were dolls. In this corner of the hall there were stone-age tools in the showcases and here, with the help of lifelike models a scene from the life in caves had been recreated. The cave men dolls wore skins as clothing, but this could only be seen at second glance with the weak lighting.

Relieved, Pete went on and soon afterwards reached an area full of display boards and models—boards with information about the origin and extraction of precious stones, models of diamond mines and grinding machines.



At the centre of this exhibition was a glass box behind a barrier of thick ropes. Inside the box, on red velvet, lay an egg-sized, light blue stone. No doubt, it was the 'Fire of the Moon'. The box stood directly under a skylight, through which silver moonlight fell and only made the stone shimmer pale—and this was rather disappointing. Pete believed that with illumination from the spotlights, it should sparkled like a Christmas tree.

Pete looked at the diamond and wondered what he should do now. Had Bob and Mr Peacock reached the security office by now?

"Faster, faster!" Mr Peacock gasped for air like a half dead fish. Still, he insisted on spurring Bob to go faster, although it was he who climbed infinitely slowly and laboriously step by step.

Finally they reached the third floor. A narrow staircase led half a floor higher. It was barricaded with a rope and a sign hanging from it that said 'Staff Only'. They stepped over it. The upper end of the stairs led to a dark corridor. Mr Peacock looked carefully around the corner as he dabbed his sweaty forehead with a handkerchief.

"What now?" Bob whispered.

"The security office is at the end of the corridor. Only there I can check what's wrong with the power supply."

"And if someone actually turned it off?" Bob asked. "Wouldn't that someone be in the security office?"

Mr Peacock put his index finger on his lips. They listened. But the intermittent breath of the museum director right next to his ear drowned out everything Bob might have been able to hear.

"There's nobody," Mr Peacock assured the detective, sneaking into the corridor. The security office door was closed. Carefully Mr Peacock pushed down the handle.

"Okay," he said, relieved. "It's locked." He pulled his thick bunch of keys out of his pocket, which had at least two dozen keys jingling, and looked for the right one in the dim light. "The fate of a museum director—keys, keys, keys," he murmured as he opened the door.

The security office was small and dark. The only window was at the back, and very little light fell from the street into the room.

Bob found the light switch, tried it, but it stayed dark. In the dim light, he recognized a big desk and some computer monitors on the wall, which were all off. Control lamps were everywhere, they didn't light up either. There were two computers on the desk. Mr Peacock went straight to the control panel.

"Normally the cameras and computers work at night," he explained while trying to get one of the devices to work. "There's nothing going on here, nothing at all. The power's out, everywhere."

"Isn't there an emergency generator?" Bob asked. "I thought museums had something like that."

"There is. But either it didn't turn on or the connections were cut." The director nervously wiped his forehead. "I didn't know for sure that... Actually it's impossible, really."

"The phone," Bob said, pointing to the phone. "This should work. Shouldn't we call the police?"

"It's just an in-house phone," Mr Peacock explained. "Admittedly, our telephone system is a little backward. External calls must be forwarded by the administration office. But since there's nobody there, we can't make any calls from here to the outside."

"Then we should go to the administration office," Bob suggested. "You do have a key, don't you?"

"Yes, yes, of course. You're right, that's the best thing." He got up groaning and stepped into the corridor past Bob. "I'm afraid the administration office is at the ground floor. I don't think we can use the lift."

"The lift!" Bob exclaimed. "I totally forgot about Jupiter and Worthington! Are they stuck in the lift?"

"Probably. Yes, probably. But we'll get a grip on it as soon as the power comes back on. A few calls and we're done." They went down the stairs.

"So you no longer believe that burglars are at work here?" Bob asked.

"I... it would be a stupid coincidence if someone wanted to break into the museum when we were here, wouldn't it?" Mr Peacock laughed quietly, but it didn't sound real. When he dabbed his forehead again, Bob realized that the director was desperately trying not to panic.

"It would be just as stupid if the power went out while we were here," Bob remarked. Mr Peacock didn't reply, but he kept stopping on the stairs to listen.

Finally they reached the ground floor from which one could see the Diplodocus skeleton. Bob looked over to the ticket booth and then to the main entrance with two glass sliding doors.

Bob flinched. The outer door was opened and at the inner one several dark figures were working on something. He could barely hid with Mr Peacock behind a pillar. Then the inner glass door was forced apart under protesting creaking and five people entered the foyer.

"Close the doors," a man ordered and his voice echoed eerily through the hall. "We don't want to attention from anyone on the street." His companions obeyed. The man swung over the metal barrier, walked towards the dinosaur skeleton and switched on a flashlight. He sighed contentedly. "It was easier than I thought. The 'Voice' was right. Once you know how to do it, it's a child's play to cut the power supply of a museum."

"Hurry up, guys. The 'Fire of the Moon' awaits us!"

The lift had just set itself in motion when suddenly there was a jolt. The light went out suddenly and it was quiet.

"My goodness, what's the matter now?" Jupiter gasped in horror. "The lift stopped."

"You don't say," Worthington remarked. They waited a few moments, but nothing moved. "Don't lifts work at night?"

"There's no reason why they shouldn't." Jupiter sighed. "Fantastic. I just have no luck with lifts. This is the third time I've been stuck in one—the first time in the dark, though."

"Don't worry, Jupiter, it won't take long," Worthington reassured him. "The others will soon realize that we're not where we should be. As director of this museum, Mr Peacock will certainly know how to get the lift moving again."

"I'm afraid we have to be a little patient," Jupe said. "After all, Mr Peacock wants to show the two of them some treasures first, as he said. You know him better—will it take long?"

"Well, Mr. Peacock can be... quite talkative, if you understand."

"Half an hour?"

"Possibly."

"Great." Jupiter opened his eyes and tried to recognize something, but not the smallest beam of light penetrated into the cabin. "You wouldn't happen to have a flashlight with you?"

“No. But a lighter.”

“I didn’t know you smoked at all.”

“Pipe. It’s my only vice,” Worthington confessed. Then a small light lit up and bathed the lift in a dim yellow light.

“Maybe we can get this thing going ourselves. I’ll give it a try,” Jupiter murmured and turned to the buttons. He pressed it indiscriminately, without success. “There’s nothing happening.” He flipped the switch with the label ‘Stop’, flipped it back again and repeated that several times. Nothing moved. Then he pressed the emergency button and bent over the microphone embedded on the control panel. “Hello! Hello! Is anyone there?” No answer. “Stupid question. Of course there’s no one there. Who would be here at this hour?”

The lighter went out. “I’m sorry, but the lighter’s getting too hot,” Worthington apologized.

The First Investigator sighed. “For a while I will endure it like this. Although I don’t like the dark very much.” He leaned against the wall and slid along it until he sat on the floor. “And that’s because I was too lazy to walk.”

“I wouldn’t see it that way,” Worthington said. “You’ve been so kind as to join me.”

They waited in silence. The luminosity of the hands on Jupiter’s wristwatch slowly lost intensity when a quarter of an hour had passed.

“But slowly they may have noticed that we are not waiting for them on the third floor. “Provided they’ve even arrived there.” He rose up again and tried to walk up and down the narrow cabin, colliding with Worthington. “Oh, sorry.”

“You seem troubled.”

“So am I,” Jupiter said. “Aren’t you nervous?”

“So far, there’s no reason for that. Besides, nervousness does not go down well with the nature of my job.”

Jupiter had to grin, although he didn’t feel like it at all. “I don’t like it,” he finally said. “We’ve been stuck too long. I can’t get rid of the feeling there’s something wrong out there.”

#### 4. 8:46 pm—Off Through the Middle

“Where are they?” Pete mumbled nervously as he looked at his watch again. “And where’s the power?” He gave Bob and Mr Peacock another two minutes and patrolled up and down like a soldier in front of the Blue Diamond. When time was up, he took a quick look at the glass cabinet and returned to the stairs through the hall with the sculptures.

Suddenly, he heard voices from below. Pete ran to the second floor and peered into the stairwell. Three or four beams of light danced around and glided over the steps. They found flashlights, Pete was thinking. At least that’s something. He was about to call down to them when he heard unfamiliar voices.

“Hurry up, guys. The ‘Fire of the Moon’ awaits us!”

“Where’s the stone?”

“On the third floor. Beth, Dog and Ernie—you go get it. We’ll stay down here and be on the watch. The ‘Voice’ said there is no night watchman and the city security service would only stop by every few hours on its patrol, but—”

“But we still have to hurry.”

“That’s right. Stay away from the other exhibits. We don’t want to leave more tracks than necessary.”

“All right, Alpha. We’ll hurry.”

The dancing lights came closer and climbed the first flight of stairs. Pete’s head flinched back. Mr Peacock was right! There were burglars in the museum! Somehow they had switched off the power and the alarm system and now they wanted to steal the Blue Diamond!

“One of you must watch the ‘Fire of the Moon’!”—the words of the director shot through his head. Pete whirled around and ran up the stairs to the third floor as quickly and quietly as possible. He had to do something—get help! Bob and Mr Peacock were together, and Jupiter and Worthington...

“Pull yourself together, Pete!” he thought. “Think! What’s the smartest thing to do?”

He wondered about the situation of his friends. Bob and Mr Peacock could not have been discovered yet, otherwise the conversation between the intruders would have been different. So they had to be in the security office at the top floor. From there they certainly had better chances to alert the police than him. Jupiter and Worthington were probably trapped in the lift. There they were unable to act, but not in immediate danger. Those in danger is him—and the diamond.

The footsteps on the stairs below him came closer. “I must get the stone to safety,” Pete thought and ran on. The rattling of his soles on the laminate flooring seemed deafeningly loud to him. By now at the latest, the burglars must have heard him. He had no time to lose! When he reached the showcase with the stone, a thought occurred to him—Mr Peacock had said that the security systems inside the museum were still working.

If he now tried to get the diamond out of his box, he would set off an alarm. It could be the best thing that he could do! Determined, he jumped over the barrier and tried to lift off the glass lid. It didn’t move and there was no alarm. Even when he shook the small lock that secured the showcase, nothing happened. Perhaps brute force might help.

The Second Investigator looked around feverishly. Nearby was a chair for the supervisory staff. He grabbed it, held it up horizontally and rammed one of the metal legs against the glass. The recoil made him stagger, but the box remained intact. He gathered all his strength and tried again. With a loud bang the glass box shattered into a thousand fragments and spread all over the floor. Excited shouts came from the next room.

Pete threw the chair aside, reached into the shards and took the 'Fire of the Moon'. Then he jumped over the barrier and looked around hectically. There was no further way here, he had to go back into the hall—and would run directly into the burglars.

He ran off, past the partitions and models until the Stone Age exhibits. From here he saw three figures in the Art Gallery approaching him. With any luck, they hadn't seen him yet. Pete scurried between the models of cave people, crouched on the floor next to a doll that was making fire. The footsteps and shouts became louder.

"The smash came from this hall. Whoever did it must still be here," said one man.

"Who?" someone else asked.

"How do I know? Somebody's here! Let's find him!"

Pete saw three shadows, and recognized the outline of a gun in the hand of one of them. Slowly, peering into every corner, they moved forward. Suddenly a man with a broad boxer face looked in Pete's direction. The stranger flinched.

"What's up, Dog?" another man said.

"These figures," Dog said. "I first thought they were real people."

A woman laughed softly. "If you're afraid of mannequins, this is the wrong job for you." They went on.

It wasn't until they were out of sight that Pete dared to breathe a sigh of relief. Cold sweat appeared on his forehead. He had to get out of here! But the three strangers were still too close.

"There!" shouted the woman. As the footsteps became faster, the voices went away. "The glass case! The Blue Diamond is gone!"

That was the opportunity! As long as they devoted their attention to the destroyed showcase, Pete could run off.

He jumped up and ran out of the hall. But the laminate floor of the Art Gallery thwarted his silent escape. He already heard voices and footsteps behind him. "There he is!" one man shouted.

Pete reached the main corridor and turned right. If his followers were wise, they would separate and sooner or later cut him off. He needed a place to hide! Frantically, he looked around. In a hall on the right was the Viking exhibits, dominated by the huge replica of a ship. Pete ran towards it, jumped over the barrier and climbed the wooden hull in the hope that the model would stand his weight. Silently, he climbed onto the deck and ducked.

Pete's heart pounded so loud that he had the feeling that it could be heard on the ground floor. His hand, which clasped the Blue Diamond tightly, hurt. Frightened, he looked at the blood that was dripping down his forearm. He must have cut himself on the broken glass. But he couldn't take care of that now, because the voices were already approaching.

"Where did he go?"

"I have no idea, Beth. We'd better split up. I'll take this room."

"All right!" Beth said.

Someone entered the Viking exhibits. The beam of a flashlight shone over the ship.

“All right, Alpha. We’ll hurry.” Three figures approached the stairs. Bob flinched. They were coming right at him! Ducking, he sneaked up the stairs and dragged Mr Peacock with him before the glow of the flashlights could catch them.

On the second floor they ran into an exhibition room and pressed themselves close to the wall next to the entrance. The voices of the three burglars came closer, then they became quieter again as they were on their way to the next floor.

“That was a close one!” Bob whispered. “You were right. Somehow these guys must have switched off the power from outside and disabled all security systems.”

“They want the diamond. Your friend Pete is still up there!”

“Pete can take care of himself,” Bob replied, although he wasn’t sure. Maybe the Second Investigator ran right into the burglars. But there was nothing he could do about it.

“We have to get help!” Bob exclaimed.

“The police!” the museum director gasped breathlessly. “Call the police, quick!”

“Where’s the administration office?” Bob asked.

“Downstairs, next to the ticket booth, right next to it.”

“If we go down the stairs, the two left behind will see us immediately,” Bob said.

“There’s another stairwell—the one for the staff.” Mr Peacock pointed his head in the right direction.

“Let’s go! Maybe we can get to the phone from there.” They ran down the corridor and Mr Peacock opened the door to the stairwell with one of his many keys. There were no windows here, so it was pitch dark. Carefully they felt their way down. Finally they reached a steel door at the end of the stairs.

“Behind it is the foyer. We must go past the Diplodocus to the other side. The administration is opposite—directly opposite.”

“Is door is locked?” Bob suspected.

“Yes, but I have the key. I have all the keys.”

“The two men are probably in the foyer,” Bob said. “So we only have two options—either we sneak across, or we run as fast as we can, unlock the door, get into the administration office and lock up behind us again.”

“We’ll first carefully unlock this door and peek out, yeah, that’s best.”

“All right. But when they see us, I’ll run,” Bob suggested. “Give me the key. I think I can get over there faster.”

“Good. Yeah, good idea.” The keys jingled, then Mr Peacock pressed the bundle into Bob’s hand and explained to him which key belonged to which door.

“Are you sure? After all, it’s pitch-black here.”

He laughed quietly. “I know all my keys.”

“Good. Let’s go.” Bob unlocked the door as slowly as he could. After the quiet click, he waited a few moments before silently pushing down the handle and opening the door a little. A narrow strip of twilight fell into the stairwell.

Bob saw the dinosaur skeleton, the big staircase and two men walking up and down and talking quietly. They would see Bob as soon as he started running. But there was also no way to sneak into the foyer unnoticed. He looked at Mr Peacock and shook his head. They waited. The men couldn’t patrol there forever.

About ten minutes passed when suddenly voices began to make themselves heard. Two men and a woman came down the stairs excitedly. “What’s the matter?” barked a voice.

“We went upstairs and heard a loud noise. The stone’s gone. Someone beat us to it,” the woman replied.

“Excuse me?” the man asked threateningly. “Somebody beat you to it? There’s no one here!”

“Yes, Alpha. We saw him run away.”

“You what? Who’s he? Where is he?”

“He got away from us.”

“He’s... Someone sneaks into this museum, grabs the ‘Fire of the Moon’ from under our noses and you let him escape?” Alpha shouted that his voice rolled over.

“Find him! Ceewee, you stay here and guard both exits. We can’t let him get away from us.” With great strides, he stormed up the stairs, followed by his three cronies. Ceewee stayed below and watched them go.

“This is the only chance!” Bob thought. He ripped the door open and ran. He was halfway across the foyer when Ceewee noticed him. “Stop! Here he is!”

Bob paid no attention to him or to Mr Peacock panting somewhere behind him. He reached the administration office, Ceewee was still twenty metres away. With trembling fingers he tried to push the key into the lock. It didn’t fit.

## 5. 9:01 pm—Gotcha!

Jupiter listened. “Is there something going on out there? Worthington, did you hear that too?”

“No, what?” Worthington asked.

“I thought I heard someone shouting,” The First Investigator sighed. “I’m probably already hearing ghosts. We’ve been stuck here for half an hour now. In the meantime they must have noticed that the lift is stuck. Why haven’t they called for us yet? This museum really can’t be that interesting that Pete and Bob want to spend the whole evening here. Something’s wrong, Worthington.”

“I can’t quite share your concern, but maybe we should make our own efforts to get out of this predicament.”

“I agree.” Jupiter stood up resolutely. “Can you open the lift with your hand?” He groped for the gap between door and cabin wall, clawed his fingers into it and pulled as hard as he could. The sliding door gave way a little, but the efforts of the First Investigator were not enough to open it completely. “Help me, Worthington!”

With their combined strength, they managed to open the door.

But when Worthington lit his lighter, they stared at a cold concrete wall. “It seems to me that we have stopped exactly between two floors,” he noted.

“That was clear,” Jupiter moaned. “Otherwise it wouldn’t be a lift adventure. All right, let’s try the ceiling. In the movies, there’s always a hatch through which you can climb out. But here I see only a metal grille.”

“There’s probably the light bulbs above it,” Worthington suspected. “And maybe an emergency exit. But I am of the opinion that it is still too early for property damage. We are not in an acute emergency—only in a somewhat unpleasant situation.”

“All right. We’ll give them another half hour out there. If nothing has happened by then, I will no longer shy away from property damage.” The First Investigator let himself sink back to the ground. His suit was pretty uncomfortable. “You should sit down too, Worthington. I don’t think it’s good for your leg to stand all the time.”

“I’m sure you’re right,” Worthington replied and joined him. But by the hesitation in his voice Jupiter recognized that it was uncomfortable for the chauffeur to lose his attitude in this way.

“This darkness is driving me crazy,” Jupiter confessed after a while. “And the confinement in this cabin. Did I ever tell you that I was once trapped for hours in a tiny and absolutely dark submarine at a depth of two thousand metres?”

“No, that’s new to me.”

“Well, if you’d like, I’ll tell you the story. Somehow we have to pass the time. Who knows when we’ll get out of this lift.”

A heavy hand lay on Bob’s shoulder and forced him around. He was staring into the barrel of a gun. Startled, he dropped the bunch of keys. Mr Peacock, who was by the side, bent down quickly and picked it up.

“Don’t move!” the man yelled. “Stand over there!”

“Where?” stuttered Bob.



“Not you! You there, fat boy. Come on, over here!”

Mr Peacock was pushed forward roughly. Now he and Bob had their backs to the wall. In front of them stood Ceewee, a brawny man with stringy hair tied to a plait and coldly flashing eyes. He kept his gun pointed at the two of them. There was no way to escape.

Now his cronies came running and stood in a semicircle around them.

“Well done, Ceewee,” Alpha whispered, then he took turns looking Bob and Mr Peacock in the eye. “Well, a few museum visitors misunderstood the opening hours. Who are you?”

“I am... the museum director, Peacock,” he croaked hoarsely.

“Bob Andrews,” said Bob, who couldn’t think of anything better.

“The director himself! What an honour!” purred Alpha velvety. He was a wiry little man with dark hair. “What are you doing here?”

“I... I wanted to show my young friend the exhibition,” Peacock explained, pulling his handkerchief out of his breast pocket.

“What a coincidence. That’s what my friends and I had in mind, too,” smiled the leader of the gang. “On this occasion, you took the Blue Diamond, didn’t you? Where is it?”

“We don’t have it,” Bob replied.

“Search them!” Alpha ordered his people. Two of the men checked Bob and Mr Peacock, but found nothing.

“The boy’s right,” the woman interrupted the search. “It wasn’t them. The thief must still be upstairs. I’m sure he didn’t leave the third floor while we were there.”

“I see. Then you’re with someone,” Alpha said. “Who’s that up there?”

They didn’t answer.

“Who?” the leader growled like an irritable wolf, staring at Bob.

“I don’t know.”

Alpha jumped forward, grabbed him by the collar and pulled him so close that Bob felt his warm breath in his face. “Don’t play games with me!”

“Leave the boy alone,” Mr Peacock said. “We both don’t know who else is hanging around here. After all, we also had no idea you’d show up. No idea at all.” Mr Peacock’s voice trembled, but Bob was glad that he had distracted Alpha’s attention for a moment.

“And I’m supposed to believe that?” Alpha snapped. “That there’s someone else buzzing around by chance who has nothing to do with us or you?”

“Believe what you want,” Mr Peacock replied. “It’s the truth, nothing but the truth, yeah.”

Alpha obviously thought Bob was the weaker opponent, because he grabbed him again and shouted: “Who is up there?”

Bob was scared. But to convince Alpha, he had to exaggerate a little. He sank to his knees and whimpered: “I don’t know!”

“All right, Alpha, he really doesn’t know,” the woman tried to calm him down. “Leave him alone.”

The leader let go of Bob, turned to the woman and shouted: “I’ll make the decisions, Beth!”

Suddenly he opened his eyes and gasped for air. His breath went panting. With trembling fingers he reached into the inside pocket of his black jacket and pulled out an inhaler. He put it in his mouth and inhaled two or three times.

Slowly he calmed down. “All right,” he continued in a normal voice. “Ceewee, you stay here and keep guarding the two exits. Beth, Dog and Ernie, you keep looking for that guy up there. And you better find him! I’ll take our two guests to the security office and look after them there. Understand?”

Without waiting for an answer, he pulled out a gun, pointed it at Mr Peacock and Bob and told them to head first. Together they left the foyer towards the stairs.

Bob was feverishly thinking. Once he got stuck in the security office, there probably wasn't a chance to escape. He had to leave now! But how? Where to? Ceewee was guarding the exits. Mr Peacock had... The key! The director had picked it up earlier and no one had noticed. That was his only ace up his sleeve. Maybe there'd still be an opportunity to escape after all.

On reaching the third floor, Alpha ordered his people: "You systematically search the entire museum, from top to bottom!"

Then he directed his two prisoners to climb the small stairs to the security office. Inside, he put his flashlight on a shelf. A small neon tube was built into the lamp, which he switched on. The cold light only brightened the room a little, but it was good to finally see more than just shadows again. Alpha dropped onto the chair and directed Bob and Mr Peacock with the gun to the opposite wall.

"What... What are you going to do now?" Bob asked hesitantly.

"Wait," Alpha replied.

"And what happens to us?"

He didn't answer.

"You can't get away with this," claimed Mr Peacock, who kept wiping his forehead dry. "No, never."

"Get away with what?" Alpha snapped.

"... With the theft of the Blue Diamond. The police will get you no matter how clever you think you are. I suggest you turn yourself in, yes, immediately."

Alpha laughed. "Turn myself in? Nobody knows we're here. No one knows who I am or where I'm going. There's no danger at all to me and my people. We will find the mysterious stranger, take the stone from him, kill him and then we will disappear without a trace."

"Kill him?" Bob cried.

A cold smile was the answer. "So you do know him!"

It wasn't a question, it was a statement. It hung in the air like a highly explosive gas.

"No," Bob said. "We really don't know who that is. We—"

All of a sudden, Mr Peacock jumped forward and kicked the back of the chair so hard that Alpha slammed his ribs at the edge of the table. The director jumped to the door and rushed into the corridor. Before Bob could react, Alpha had jumped up. The much younger and faster man had caught up with Mr Peacock after only a few steps. He grabbed him by the shoulder and rammed the handle of his gun onto the back of his neck. Mr Peacock went down moaning.

When the light from the flashlight was gone, Pete breathed a sigh of relief. They hadn't spotted him, but it was only a matter of time. He had to leave! He had to alert the police! He had to free Jupiter and Worthington! He had to find Bob and Mr Peacock! He had to...

"Think!" he murmured. "I have to think first!"

Could he risk leaving his hiding place? Maybe the burglars were still nearby, just waiting for him to come out. On the other hand, this may have been his last chance to escape. His hand hurt. He closed his eyes and listened. He heard nothing but the throbbing of his heart and the sound of blood in his ears.

He waited five minutes. Then he heard soft voices nearby. He didn't understand a single word, it was too far away for that, but they sounded very excited. Hesitantly, Pete looked

over the ship's railing. Nothing moved.

He climbed down and sneaked to the exit of the hall, where he carefully looked into the main corridor. There was no one here either. From shadow to shadow he worked his way up to the stairs and looked down. The voices were still audible. The whole gang seemed to be down there. Pete slowly went down step by step. He had just reached the second floor when footsteps could be heard on the stone floor of the foyer. They were going up the stairs!

"Damn!" hissed Pete. "Waited too long!"

He ran back upstairs and went to his old hiding place aboard the Viking ship. Nobody would come looking for him here any time soon. Again steps came closer and now Pete could finally understand something.

"You systematically search the entire museum from top to bottom!"

"Great," thought Pete. It was too late to escape now. He could only hope that his pursuers weren't very thorough.

It wasn't long before the steps approached the Viking hall. "Ernie, you stay in the corridor so he doesn't get away from us. Beth and I will search room by room."

Two figures glided through the darkness of the hall, but not as erratic as last time. They searched every nook and cranny, shining between Viking helmets and the video installations. Then they approached the ship. Pete ducked even deeper. He was glad he chose this hiding place. The railing was so high that it was impossible to spot him. At least as long as they didn't come up with the idea of looking on the deck.

The glare of the flashlights fell through the narrow cracks between the wooden planks. It slid towards Pete, ever closer and finally heading away. He was just about to breathe a sigh of relief when the spot of light suddenly stopped.

"Here's something!" shouted the woman. "Shine the light over there!" A second beam of light joined in.

"That's blood! Someone must have climbed on the ship."

## 6. 9:14 pm—Escape Attempts

“Mr Peacock!” Bob broke away from his rigidity and ran towards the museum director lying on the ground.

“Stop!” Alpha hissed and pointed the gun at him.

Bob obeyed. “But... but he needs help!”

Alpha hesitated for a moment, then lowered his gun and nodded.

After the detective knelt down next to the director, he carefully turned him on his back and felt his pulse. “He’s just unconscious,” he noted with relief.

“Of course. If I wanted to kill him, I’d have used my gun differently,” Alpha said. “It’s crazy for him to do that. I hope you learn from his mistake. Come on, take him to the office!”

Bob carefully dragged the unconscious man out of the corridor.

Back into the security office, he took off his suit jacket, folded it and placed the director’s head on it. His eyes fell on Mr Peacock’s jacket. Something flashed out—the keys!

“He won’t wake up yet,” Bob said, feeling for his pulse again. As if by chance, he slipped into a position that shielded Peacock from Alpha’s gaze. Bob quickly reached for the bunch of keys and let it slide slowly, without a sound, into his trousers pocket. “I’m sure you hurt him badly, and he needs a doctor.”

“He’ll come around,” Alpha was convinced.

“Are you sure?” Bob asked aggressively.

Alpha’s face darkened. “Listen, boy. I can handle you any other way I want! You have the choice—either you shut your mouth and you can hold the hands of our esteemed museum director, or you lie right next to him!”

Bob was silent. Alpha was not an opponent he could push into a corner by talking to. Jupiter might be able to do it. He was able to influence people to such an extent that in the end they didn’t even know their name anymore. But Jupiter wasn’t here.

Suddenly he realized that they had an advantage over Alpha and his gang—they knew that there were two people trapped in the lift. Only Jupiter and Worthington had no idea of the situation they were in. And there was no way to inform them.

Hopefully at least Pete could get away from the burglars. Maybe he even got out of this building and called the police. But Bob didn’t have the slightest idea what was happening.

Pete suddenly sank his heart into his pants. They are about to find him!

“Hey! Come out!” shouted the woman. “We know you’re up there!”

The Second Investigator’s thoughts are racing. If he didn’t turn himself in, they might use force. On the other hand... what would they do to him if he turned himself in?

“You don’t stand a chance! We’ve surrounded your hiding place!”

Pete knew that was a lie. There were only two of them. There was no question of being surrounded.

Suddenly Pete had an idea—they couldn’t know he was still in the ship. He could have left the ship by now. Hopefully the burglars were smart enough to think that far.

“Maybe he’s not even there anymore, Beth,” he promptly heard the man whisper.

“Let’s find out,” Beth said. “I’m gonna climb up. Get Ernie for backup!”

Footsteps moved away. A little later, two people came back.

“You got him?”

“Almost. He’s up there,” Beth said. “Probably, anyway.”

“What if he’s armed?”

“Then he would have shot long ago,” Beth said. “I’m climbing up now. Cover me.”

Pete only had one chance—he had to distract her. His gaze fell on the sail, which was held in tension with a loosely knotted rope. He took off his shoes in a flash, squatted into the starting position and waited. The woman climbed up the ship’s side and skilfully swung herself onto the deck.

At that moment, Pete threw his shoe to the stern of the ship, and hit some wooden planks. He threw the second shoe right after. The second shoe flew over the railing and crashed into a showcase below them. For a moment the burglars were distracted and did not look in his direction.

Pete jumped up, tore off the rope and slipped under the falling sail. On the other side, he stepped over the railings. The manoeuvre had worked. The three had only paid attention to the noise made by the shoes and the sail crashing down without noticing him.

“Where is he? He must be here somewhere!” Beth shouted. But Pete was no longer on board the ship. If he could leave the Viking hall unnoticed, he would be safe for the time being.

But he didn’t make it. When he was about three steps from the stairs, Ernie shouted: “Dog! Beth! There he is!”

Pete couldn’t keep the three pursuers off his back for long. There was only one way—he had to go down to the exit. Like lightning he jumped down the stairs. The pursuers fell behind. They were not up to his short-distance sprint, which he had trained for years.

Always taking four steps at a time, he raced towards the ground floor. With momentum he jumped into the foyer—and saw the man standing in front of the exit. While trying to turn around with socks on his feet, he slipped on the smooth stone floor and fell.

Shouting became loud. Panicked, Pete tore his socks off his feet, got up and ran barefooted to a small door on the side of the entrance hall—the only path that hadn’t been cut off yet. Please let it be open!

The door opened and he slipped through. It was pitch black. But in the half second that light had fallen in, he had recognized a bare stairwell going up. Blindly groping, he found the railing and stumbled up the steps, painfully pushing his bare toes.

Below him he heard his pursuers again. They saved their strength and had stopped shouting, but Pete could hear their wheezing and the trampling of their shoes on the concrete. By accident, Pete’s hand touched a handle. He pushed it down, jumped through the exit and found himself in the main corridor of the second floor.

One of the chairs for the guards stood opposite on the wall. The Second Investigator grabbed it and clamped the backrest under the door handle. It was not a second too soon, because the burglars were already shaking at it. The chair blocked the door handle. But that wouldn’t hold them up long. In one minute at the latest, they could have left the stairwell on another floor and come up the main staircase. He needed a place to hide!

Exhausted, he stumbled into the next room where, in dim lighting, he saw a huge model of a tarantula. But Pete didn’t have time to learn about spiders and insects. He looked for dark corners and angles where no one could find him. Finally he hid under a large, flat showcase for butterflies. With his eyes closed, he gave his blood circulation a chance to calm down.

His feet were aching and his hand still hurt. Hopefully he hadn’t left another trail of blood. But he was relieved when he felt that the wound had somewhat encrusted.

What was he supposed to do now? He still had no idea where Bob and Mr Peacock were. Jupiter and Worthington were probably still in the lift and had no idea what was going on. He had to get to someone!

Jupiter could have thought of something! He always thought of something!

Footsteps approached. It was just one person. Pete guessed that they broke up looking for him. Fortunately, they didn't know what floor he was on. The footsteps passed the entrance to the Insect exhibits and went away again.

Pete waited a few more minutes until he was sure there was nobody nearby, then he crawled out of his hiding place and carefully peered into the corridor. Nobody was there. Nearby he saw the second floor lift landing in the semi-darkness, which lay in a particularly deep shadow. He stayed there for a few seconds, then clawed his fingers into the gap of the sliding door and pulled them apart with all his might. Pete bent forward a little to look into the black shaft. Two metres below him was the stuck cabin.

Suddenly, a hand covered his mouth with an iron grip.

"I have to say, you guys have an amazing talent for getting into trouble over and over again," Worthington said after Jupiter told the story about his adventurous submarine ride in *The Case of the Mutiny at Sea*.

"Is that so?" Jupiter remarked. "I don't know how we keep doing this, either. Even when there are no criminals around, there's trouble. For example, at this moment, we are stuck in this lift." Jupiter became more serious. "I'm not sure if there's anything behind this blackout, but I'm getting worried."

"I confess that the situation also imposes some unpleasant considerations on me," Worthington confessed. "Perhaps we should try to escape our prison on our own initiative. Even if the half hour is not over."

"That's a very good suggestion!" Jupiter jumped up and asked Worthington to make light. With the light of the small flame he stretched himself to the metal grid. But the not-very-tall First Investigator could only stick his fingers between the bars. "We should switch roles. You're taller."

Now Worthington tampered with the grid while Jupiter held the lighter. "It's bolted down," the chauffeur said. "Obviously, they trusted the emergency call system so much that they thought an emergency exit was unnecessary."

"Just my luck," Jupiter exclaimed. "I usually have my Swiss knife with me but today, in this attire, it did not occur to me to bring it. You wouldn't happen to have a screwdriver with you... coincidentally."

"Excuse me?" Worthington reached into the inside pocket of his jacket and pulled out a pocket knife. "In my youth I was a boy scout," he explained. "Apart from the principle of doing a good deed every day, I've learned that carrying a pocket knife can be useful."

"Worthington, you're a genius!" Jupiter shouted enthusiastically. "And you now have the opportunity to do the good deed of the day. Go ahead, Worthington!"

"Very good, sir." He set to work. The screws were soon loosened. Now the grille could be removed. As they had suspected, a tangle of cables and light bulbs attached to a plastic plate came to light. "This should be a little more difficult if we don't want to damage anything."

"Ouch!" Jupiter dropped the lighter. It had become so hot that he had burned himself. "We have a problem. Even if the lighter stayed cold, it'd soon be empty. I'd hate to be in the dark right now."

“Without light, I’ll hardly be able to remove the plate.”

“All right.” The First Investigator waited a moment for the light source to cool down, then let the flame light up again. Worthington began unscrewing the lamps, loosening the cables and gradually exposing the plate. It took a long time and they had to interrupt their work again and again to give the lighter, Jupiter’s fingers and Worthington’s arms a rest.

Just as Worthington had removed the last cables, the inevitable happened—the flame became smaller and smaller until it just hovered in the darkness as a tiny blue dot.

“I guess that’s it,” said the First Investigator, and the fire went out. “Now we must go on blind. Can you do it, Worthington?”

“Maybe after a little break.” The chauffeur sat down exhausted. “My arms have become a little heavy.”

“Nobody’s pushing us,” Jupiter joked to cover up his discomfort. “Maybe we could—” He stopped.

“What is it, Jupiter?”

“Shh! Do you hear that? There was a noise!”

A soft scraping and squeaking sound came out of the lift shaft from above.

“This is probably our rescue party,” Worthington said. “I guess we disassembled the cabin lighting a little too soon. This should be the right time to make our presence felt.” He took a deep breath.

“No, Worthington!” hissed Jupiter. “Not yet!”

“Why not?”

“I... I have a funny feeling. We should wait and see if anyone calls for us.”

They kept quiet. The squeaking repeated itself, then a quiet rumble and it remained silent for a few seconds. Finally Jupiter heard whispering voices.

## 7. 9:20 pm—Eavesdropping Attack

When Pete felt a hand on his mouth, he almost fell into the lift shaft in shock. But one hand gripped his shoulder and held him tight, and another hand covered his mouth. Pete tried to tear himself free, but the grip was ironclad. There was no point screaming for help. Pete was surprised the stranger didn't call for backup. And why did the stranger keep his mouth shut? Something was wrong here.

"Shh!" the man hissed quietly. "You're not one of them, are you?" Pete gave up his resistance.

The stranger then issued a warning: "Be quiet!" Almost instantly the grip came loose. Then the hand disappeared from his mouth as well.

"Who are you?" Pete whispered and turned around. The man's face was just a black spot in the dark.

"James Elroy," he introduced himself. "I'm the night watchman."

"The night watchman?" Pete asked in surprise—and a little too loud.

"Shh!"

"Yeah, all right. How long have you been here? Do you know what's going on here?"

"I know the power suddenly went out and five people entered the museum. I wanted to alert the police, but literally nothing works in this building anymore. Then I realized that Mr Peacock was here with you guys."

"What should we do now? How do we get out of here?"

"First, we must get the Blue Diamond to safety. We can't get out that fast. There are only two exits, and they're guarded by the long-haired guy," Mr Elroy whispered. "You have the stone, don't you?"

"Yes, I have it." Pete pulled it out. "Give it to me! I know a perfectly safe hiding place for it." Mr Elroy reached for the gem, but Pete pulled his hand back at the last moment. "How can I trust you?"

"I work for Mr Peacock," the night watchman answered angrily. "I'm on your side! If these guys catch you with the stone, all is lost. Or do you seriously think they'll let witnesses live?"

Pete got scared. He hadn't thought that far. "But what's the use of hiding the stone? If they catch us, they are still gonna get it."

Mr Elroy shook his head. "Not if they don't have the loot yet. Without the 'Fire of the Moon', they will certainly not just go away."

"How do you know all of this so well?" But the night watchman didn't have time to answer. Footsteps came closer.

"We have to get out of here!" He hissed, reached for the stone and merged into the dark two seconds later.

Stunned, Pete looked at his still open, but now empty hand, then into the lift shaft. Now it was too late to contact Jupiter.

"I'll be back!" he whispered down, hoping the First Investigator could hear him. Then he closed the lift door and went back to his hiding place at the Insect exhibits.

"I have bad timing today," he mumbled and hoped for his pursuers to disappear again.



Bob kept looking anxiously at Mr Peacock, who was still lying unconscious on the ground. He might need medical attention. There was nothing Bob could do.

In the meantime, Alpha was pacing up and down the office uneasily now. He must have expected his people to catch Pete faster. Bob knew the Second Investigator's top athletic abilities well enough to know that he wasn't so easy to catch. But it was only a matter of time. He had to do something!

He went over to the desk and slowly sat down on the chair, always watching the leader of the gang. But Alpha didn't seem to notice him at all. Bob picked up a pen and played around with it. He let his gaze wander over the table. In the glow of the faint neon tube he recognized black monitors, computer keyboards and countless buttons and switches on a long control panel on the desk. Some of the buttons were labelled, but mostly with abbreviations that Bob did not understand. They were probably switches for individual security systems. Some signs were more precise, such as 'Camera 1', 'Camera 2', 'Camera 3', 'Ventilation 1', 'Ventilation 2', 'Emergency Lift Call', 'Foyer Lighting'...

Wait a minute! 'Emergency Lift Call'! A tiny loudspeaker and a small microphone were placed under a toggle switch. It's the switch to turn on the intercom to the lift cabin for emergencies! Bob took a quick look at Alpha, but he was still wandering up and down, lost in thought. Bob had the sure feeling that he could use the intercom to his advantage. But how? With the power failure this system probably did not work either. On the other hand, emergency calls were needed in such cases. Perhaps it was equipped with a battery? If he turned on the intercom, he should be able to let Jupe and Worthington hear the conversations in the security office.

Bob thought feverishly. Then he discovered another button labelled 'Talk', which made him realize that the intercom system used a Push-to-Talk mechanism like a Walkie-Talkie. Bob tore a small strip of paper from the desk. With his hands hidden under the desk, he folded the paper into a tiny wedge. When Alpha turned his back on him, Bob pressed the 'Talk' button and pushed the wedge in between so that the button couldn't snap back again. His hands twitched back as Alpha turned to him.

"Where are they?" Alpha said furiously and stared at Bob as if he expected an answer from him. Then he continued his pacing through the office. Bob fumbled for the toggle switch and flipped it. He cleared his throat quietly to drown out the click. A red light came on. The intercom was working! The lamp stared into the dusky room like a glowing eye. Bob quickly pushed a small desk calendar to cover the red light before Alpha turned around.

"Hey! What are you fiddling around with?"

The acoustics of the lift shaft ensured that Jupiter understood every word whispered two metres above him. Worthington and he listened intently until the conversation came to an abrupt end and the lift doors were closed. Only then did Jupiter dare to breathe.

"Did you hear that, Worthington?"

"I did indeed. Seems to me our problem is bigger than we thought."

"Our problem is huge," Jupiter whispered involuntarily. "So I was right about my suspicion that there was something wrong here. We have to do something!"

"And what would that be?"

"First of all, we need to get out of here."

"I'm not sure that's a good idea," Worthington doubted. "If there are indeed five criminal subjects in this building, it is not advisable to meet them."

“But we have to do something!” Jupiter said. “They don’t know we’re here. Anyway, I hope so. Pete’s on the loose. If Bob and Mr Peacock are already in the hands of the burglars, they certainly would not have told them that we are here—otherwise we would have had visitors by now.”

Jupiter pinched his lower lip. He always did this when his brain was running at full speed. “The burglars are searching for the ‘Fire of the Moon’, but they haven’t got it. So right now they have concerns other than inspecting the lift. Maybe we can come out unnoticed and get help. Together with Pete and the night watchman, we’re four.”

“Three and a half,” Worthington disagreed. “My options for action are somewhat limited due to my plastered leg.”

“Are you still able to clear the exit up there?”

“I think so.” Worthington tried to remove the plastic plate, but stopped after a few moments. “It’s screwed on, too,” he explained. “In the dark it will take a little longer for me to loosen the screws.” He set to work while Jupiter waited patiently.

“Maybe once we get out of here, we’ll find Pete. Or he’ll come back. He promised. Together we’ll find a way out of this museum—before they find us. How did the gang manage to turn off the power? A museum is no ordinary apartment building. There are security measures! They must have been pretty damn good at disabling that. Well, otherwise they wouldn’t have dared to come in here. I would like to know if they are only interested in the diamond or if there is something else behind it. What do you think, Worthington?” Suddenly Jupiter realized that he had been thinking out loud all along to get his nervousness under control—and the oppressive feeling that was spreading in his stomach. This cabin was narrow and dark. Jupiter hated narrowness and darkness.

“I don’t know,” the chauffeur replied, completely focused on his work. After five minutes he had made it. “Well, the plate can be removed.”

“Above is the ceiling,” Jupiter said as he got up and felt round the opening. “Hopefully it’s really the ceiling, not just another layer we have to remove.”

“No,” Worthington said. “I can feel a narrow gap that forms a rectangle. This could be some kind of emergency exit. The only question is how to open it.”

“Give it a push,” Jupiter suggested.

“I already did that.”

“Maybe there’s a lever somewhere or... ah! I think there’s something here! Some kind of clamp or something. I’ll pull it.” With a loud click, the bracket snapped open. The bracket was holding the metal grille like the lid of a preserving jar. Now the exit to the top could be uncovered.

Worthington pushed the plate aside with a quiet clatter. The First Investigator had hoped that some light would fall through the opening. But it remained dark.

“So here we are,” Jupiter said. “Do you think you can climb up?”

“I can try.” Worthington said. But after a few moments the chauffeur gave up. He let himself fall back and moaned quietly in pain. “I’m extremely sorry, Jupiter, but I can’t bend my leg. I’ll never get through the hatch like this.”

“What if I help you?”

“You’d have to pull me up.”

“All right,” Jupiter murmured. “Then I guess I’ll have to try.”

He had never been an enthusiastic climber before. But with Worthington’s help, who clasped his hands together to make a robber ladder, he managed to squeeze his way through the narrow opening.

He got up to the roof of the lift cabin, which was wobbling alarmingly—at least that's how he felt. In darkness, he carefully felt his way around. Thick steel ropes held the lift in position. Metal rails were embedded in the concrete walls in which the cabin could slide smoothly up and down. A terrible thought flashed through Jupiter—what if the current suddenly came back on and the lift started moving? He should definitely hurry.

"I'll try climbing up somewhere," he whispered to Worthington. "Unfortunately, there are no projections or indentations on the walls, so I have to pull myself up on the steel cables."

"Be careful! Good luck!"

"Thank you, I can use it!" His effort reminded him of how he hated gymnastics lessons, in which he was forced to climb stupid ropes hanging from the ceiling of the hall. Mostly these efforts ended with him dangling helplessly like a wet sack one metre above the ground and not getting any further, while everyone else was climbing as if they were descended in a direct line from monkeys.

Jupiter breathed deeply once, grabbed the cable and pressed the inside of his shoe soles against it as additional support. He laboriously pushed his way forward piece by piece and thought briefly of his suit. It was probably ruined. The oil that was on the cable was not only damaging his clothes, but also hindered his climbing skills. When he had already got up a fair bit, his feet suddenly slipped.

His hands didn't grip hard enough and he slipped down, with the steel fibres cutting into the palms of his hands. With a cry of pain he landed on the roof of the cabin and almost fell through the emergency exit one floor below. Swearing, he waved his hands, they burned like fire.

"What happened?" Worthington shouted, worried.

"I slipped! Ouch, my hands!"

"Can you do it again?"

Jupiter touched the rope as a test, but immediately the pain twitched through him. "Not with these hands!"

"Is there no other way?"

"I'm afraid not. The damn cable!" Jupiter kicked the cable angrily, and then climbed down laboriously. "So much for our ingenious escape plan," he cursed and blew on his scraped skin. "I'm a jerk too!"

"This could have happened to anyone, Jupiter."

"Make no effort to comfort me, Worthington. That's nice of you to say, but it won't get us anywhere. What are we supposed to do now?"

Worthington didn't know the answer to that. For minutes there was an embarrassing silence. Then suddenly they heard a strange noises. Something cracked. Jupiter was already afraid that his kick against the cable could have fatal consequences.

They heard a voice. It didn't come from above like the last time they overheard Pete and the night watchman. The voice was just next to him inside the cabin!

"Hey! What are you fiddling around with?"

## 8. 9:44 pm—Confessions

Bob flinched and looked at Alpha innocently. “I didn’t do anything, really.”

“Hands off. Got it?” Without another word, he made his rounds again.

“How... how did you get into the museum?” Bob broke the silence.

“Through the door,” Alpha grumbled reluctantly.

“I mean, how did you turn off the alarm?”

Alpha stopped and looked sharply at Bob. “Why all of a sudden are you so talkative, kid?”

Bob swallowed. “I... I was just wondering.”

“You want to do something like this, don’t you?” He laughed harshly. “All right. I’ll give you lessons while we wait for my people to catch that guy.

“A museum is equipped with various security systems. If one of them fails, another steps in and the incident will be reported immediately. When it comes to power supply, you rely on more than one source. After all, a cable can always get burnt through or a line can be damaged by an earthquake.

“In the case of the Steadman Museum, five different sources supply this building with electricity. And you have to switch off all five at the same time so that the interrupted power supply does not trigger an alarm at the police.”

“Five different sources,” Bob said. “So it’s no coincidence, then, that there are five of you here.”

Alpha laughed. “Not at all.”

“But how did you disrupt the power supply?” Bob asked. “How did you know where the connections were? I wouldn’t know anything about it.”

“That was the client’s business,” Alpha replied.

“You work for someone?” Bob asked, surprised. “I thought you were after the ‘Fire of the Moon’ yourself.”

“Me? No way!” Alpha exclaimed. “It takes far too much time and effort to turn that into money. The item is known, you have to be careful, otherwise you run into the hands of a covert investigator if you want to sell it. No, no, I’d rather leave that to other people.”

“Your client.”

“Exactly.”

“And... who’s that?”

“I’m having fun with you, boy!” Alpha snapped. “I feel like I’m in a police interrogation. You want names, huh?” Laughing, he turned away and walked around the office. “Even if I wanted to tell you, I couldn’t.”

Bob frowned. “What’s that supposed to mean? Do you know the name of your—”

“I don’t even know his face,” Alpha interrupted.

“So how did you get this job?” Bob asked.

“You’re pretty curious.” Alpha gave Bob a sharp look. Then he laughed contemptuously. “Whatever. You won’t be able to do anything with the information anyway. Everything was over the phone,” he explained. “We just call him the ‘Voice’. He gave me the order and the

instructions without us ever meeting in person. The ‘Voice’ told me how to bypass the museum’s security systems.”

“How does he know that?”

“I don’t know, and I don’t care, as long as the information is accurate. My client said it’s easy to get into a museum if you know how to do it. He was right. It was child’s play.”

“If the ‘Voice’ knows all this so well, why doesn’t he steal the ‘Fire of the Moon’ himself?” Bob asked.

“Maybe he didn’t have enough people. Or he wouldn’t want to get his hands dirty. There’s always some residual risk.” Alpha’s face darkened. “As we’re experiencing right now.”

Bob wanted to get around the subject. A chattering Alpha was much less dangerous than one with an irascible roar. “How does your client know you’re actually gonna deliver the stone?”

“He doesn’t know. It’s a matter of mutual trust. We trust that he will not lure us into a trap and set the police on us; he trusts that we will also appear with the loot at the agreed place of delivery.”

“And will you do it? After all, you could just keep the Blue Diamond and disappear,” Bob couldn’t resist adding, “if you get it.”

Alpha noticed the tip very well and gave Bob a gloomier look. The detective regretted his last words, as he should not underestimate Alpha.

“That’s right,” Alpha said. “But then I would have a gem on my neck whose theft would go through the press for weeks and with which I would have to wait at least a year before I could turn it into money. No, I prefer the other method—get rid of the loot as quickly as possible and collect the money.”

“A lot of money, I suppose.”

“Enough to make it worth the effort,” Alpha said. “Even though we may face unforeseen difficulties.”

Suddenly fast steps approached. A few moments later, Dog, Ernie and Beth stood in the doorway to the office. The woman looked confused at the director lying on the ground. “What happened here?”

“He wanted to run away. I had to take some counter-measures. So?” Alpha asked sharply. “Where is he?”

Beth looked uncertainly from one to the other and finally confessed: “The stone? It’s still with the—”

“—The thief! What?” Alpha shouted so abruptly that Bob jerked with terror. The three of them lowered their heads as if on command. “Where is he?” hissed their leader.

“He... he got away from us,” confessed Dog meekly.

“I don’t think I heard you properly,” Alpha said quietly.

“He escaped,” Ernie repeated.

“Is that supposed to mean he got past Ceewee and left the building?” Alpha growled.

“No,” Ernie replied quickly. “He’s still here. We almost had him twice, too. But he’s amazingly fast. And he crashed half a Viking ship on us!”

“I’m not interested in your Viking ship! You idiots let him get away!”

“He’s still somewhere in the building,” Dog tried to calm him down. “He’s just hiding.”

“Somewhere?” Alpha taunted. “Somewhere? And when do you intend to find him? In two hours? At dawn? Or when security opens the doors tomorrow morning?” He came close to the three of them.

“When?” Alpha continued yelling. “When? You idiots!” Then he gasped for air. His breath became rattling and whistling.

“You mustn’t get so excited,” Beth said, worried.

Alpha didn’t answer. Hectically, he reached into his pocket and pulled out the inhaler to quickly spray a dose into his mouth. Only then did he calm down again.

“All right,” he went on as if nothing had happened. “There are three of you and you haven’t managed to find this fellow. I gave you half an hour. Enough to comb through a museum.”

“But... the building is huge!” Ernie cried. “There are countless places to—”

“You’re losers!” Alpha yelled again. “From now on, I’m gonna take matters into my own hands. Ernie, you stay here and watch over our dear warden in case he comes to. Dog, Beth, you’re with me.” Abruptly he turned around, walked towards Bob with two big steps and grabbed him up by the collar of his white shirt.

“Hey!” Bob yelled in panic. “What?”

“You’re my hostage. If I can make it clear to your friend that you won’t be among the living for long, he’ll come out.” With these words Alpha pulled out his gun and held it under Bob’s chin.

“But... but I...” stuttered the detective, “... I don’t even know that guy!”

“He’s right, Alpha,” Beth said forcefully. “It’s really not the boy’s fault there’s a stranger here—”

“This boy knows him!” screamed the leader, that his voice overturned. “Are you blind? You don’t seriously think I fell for his story?”

“I really don’t know who—” Bob tried to defend himself.

“Shut up, kid, or you’re gonna regret this!” Alpha dragged him forward, pressed the barrel of the gun against his back and pushed him out of the office and down the corridor. Beth and Dog followed them.

As the voices became quieter, Jupiter groaned. “Bob’s in trouble! In the greatest of difficulties! And Pete too! There must be something we can do!”

“At least now we know exactly what we’re involved in,” Worthington said. “As long as we’re stuck here, it won’t help us. Your criminological skills are admirable, Jupiter, but I think that’s the best thing that could have happened to us. Believe me, we would have been discovered long ago outside this lift cabin. But as long as the burglars don’t know we’re here, we still have a chance.”

Jupiter sighed. “Maybe you’re right, Worthington. We must be content with what we have and make the best of it. Bob did a first-class job. I’m sure he was responsible for the intercom. When I had to sneeze earlier, I thought it was all over, but I recall that we have to press the ‘Talk’ button at the lift panel over there for them to hear us. As it is, we can now safely hear them but not the other way round. We should review everything we have heard. Maybe that’ll get us somewhere.”

They reconstructed the whole case based on what they had heard and memorized every detail of the conversation between Bob and Alpha. Everything could be important later.

“Actually, a perfectly normal break-in,” Jupiter summed up. “Well thought out and planned, but it was just pure greed.”

“And a mysterious client,” Worthington added thoughtfully.

“Yes, the ‘Voice’,” Jupiter murmured and pinched his lower lip. “Speaking of voice, did you notice anything during the conversation earlier?”

“About Alpha?” Worthington said. “He suddenly seemed to have difficulty breathing.”

“Yeah, that too, but that’s not my point,” Jupiter said. “It’s one of the other two men who joined later—have you noticed anything?”

“No,” Worthington replied at a loss. “Nothing conspicuous. Why?”

“Maybe I’m just imagining it,” Jupiter thought. “But the voice of one of them sounded kind of familiar to me. I don’t know where I’ve heard it before, but I felt like I knew this person.”

“Personally?”

“No,” he replied hesitantly. “More like knowing the voice of a newscaster. I can’t swear to it, but I’m almost sure I know who the man is.”

## 9. 10:03 pm—Under Duress

It had become quiet near Pete. Again and again, the burglars passed by the Insect exhibits, entered it and searched every corner with their flashlights, but without finding him. The Second Investigator had remained calm and had not left his hiding place under the butterfly showcase. In the meantime it had become quiet.

Pete then wondered whether they had caught the night watchman and taken the stone from him. Perhaps the burglars had long since left the museum and he no longer needed to hide. But he did not dare to crawl out of his hiding place.

Twice he had narrowly escaped from his pursuers. He didn't want to push his luck too far. But he had to talk to Jupiter. He secretly trusted that the First Investigator had a plan ready only to be put into action. After all, Jupiter had had enough time in his lift prison to think about the situation and he should have come up with several possible solutions. Otherwise why was he considered a mastermind? All this is assuming that Juve even knew the situation they were in. He might not even have heard the conversation between Pete and the night watchman.

Pete was still struggling with a decision when he suddenly heard a voice. Again he hesitated for too long, he cursed in thoughts and listened. The voice got louder.

"I know you're hiding somewhere! We have your friend Bob and the director with us!"

There was a cry, and that was clearly Bob! Pete flinched. What were they up to?

"Well, come out if you don't want anything to happen to your friend! I'll give you ten minutes! If you haven't shown up in the security office by then, you won't see your friends alive again!"

The voice went away to another section and the message was repeated to make sure that Pete heard it wherever he was.

The Second Investigator took a look at his watch and moaned. What was he supposed to do now? He had ten minutes to come up with a plan. But after a few seconds, he realized that he had no plan. Therefore, he had no choice. Running away from the burglars and hiding was one thing. However, when Bob's life is at stake, it was a completely different thing.

Pete didn't know these people. He didn't know how ruthless they really were and whether they were serious about their threat. The risk was too great not to take them seriously. The ultimatum of their leader, however, had one advantage—the burglars would be waiting at the security office. So the Second Investigator could move freely in the museum for ten minutes. He looked at his watch—eight minutes to go.

"Why don't we hear anything anymore?" Jupiter impatiently drummed his fingers on the floor. "What are they doing up there?"

"It's only been a few minutes," Worthington tried to calm him down.

Angrily the First Investigator struck with the fist against the wall. "If only we could get out of this damn lift! If we just—" He fell silent.

Was there a noise? He got up listening. There it was again—the same scraping and squeaking that he had heard before. "Somebody's above us!" he whispered.

"Juve? Worthington?"



"Pete! Thank heavens! What's the matter?"

"We have burglars in the museum, Jupe," the soft voice of the Second Investigator echoed through the lift shaft. "They want to..."

"We know everything!" Jupiter spoke to him. "Bob's made sure we can hear everything that's being said in the security office."

"Hear everything? How?" Pete asked. "No, explain it to me later. We don't have much time. They want to kill Bob if I don't show up at the security office in six minutes."

"Kill?" Jupe startled.

"Yes, they're serious. What's your plan?"

Jupiter quipped. "Plan? I don't have a plan!"

"You don't have one? You always have a plan, Jupe!"

"You have to definitely go, Pete. Who knows what else they'll do to Bob!"

"I realize that," Pete replied irritably. "Is that all? You can't think of anything else?"

Jupiter thought feverishly. "All they want is the Blue Diamond. Maybe they'll let you go when they get it. Suggest a trade to them—our freedom against the stone."

"I don't have the stone anymore!"

"You don't... you don't have the stone anymore?"

"No, Elroy the night watchman has it."

"You gave it to him?" Jupiter couldn't believe what he heard.

"He just took it. It all happened so fast, I couldn't do anything about it."

"And where is he now?"

"I have no idea!" Pete snapped. "He should have hidden the diamond and then himself. He knows this museum like the back of his hand and knows where no one would find him."

"All right. Go to the security office now. Hopefully they'll believe that you don't know where the stone is."

"I hope so, too," Pete murmured. "And what are you going to do? Can't you climb out?"

"I'm afraid not," Worthington interfered. "Various physical limitations do not allow us to escape this prison."

"Don't worry about us," Jupe said. "We'll manage somehow. But don't mess around with them! And also, don't let them know we're here!"

"Do you think I'm stupid?"

"You'll be fine, Pete. Good luck!"

"Likewise." The Second Investigator closed the lift door, then silence reigned.

"This doesn't look good," Jupiter sighed. "Now the criminals have Bob, Pete and Director Peacock. We're the only ones left. But that won't help us."

"There's still this night watchman," Worthington thought.

"Yes. The night watchman..." Jupiter said. "Something's wrong with this story."

"What do you mean?" Worthington asked.

"The police should have been here by now."

"How's that? The police don't know anything about any of this."

"And that's exactly what makes me suspicious," Jupiter continued his reflections. "The night watchman must have a key to all important rooms and exits. What did Pete say? He knows the museum like the back of his hand. Then why hasn't he managed to escape yet? For him, the locked door we came through shouldn't be a problem. But apparently he's still in the building, or help would be here by now. Why did he stay?"

"He's probably too scared."

"No, Worthington. I think there's more to it than that."

## 10. 10:12 pm—Into the Lion's Den

With a beating heart Pete climbed up into the lion's den. And the lion awaited him—greedy and ready to attack. Arriving at the small staircase, he stepped over the barrier and sneaked up. After a few steps, he called himself to order. What was the point of sneaking up on them? He finally wanted to turn himself in. He could march into the security office with his head held high. The diamond was gone. Even the gang couldn't do anything about it.

His heart pounded louder with every step. The stairs led to a corridor, at the right end of which a door was opened.

Pete reached the door and stood at the doorway. In the light of the pale neon tube, four members of the gang stared at him but made no movement. They knew he'd come to them on his own free will. Pete hesitated only for a moment, then he set himself in motion and tried to put as much confidence as possible into his facial expression and gait.

Then he saw Bob kneeling next to the director on the ground. "What with him?" Pete asked, shocked. "Is he..."

"Only unconscious," said the smallest of the men, smiling at him almost friendly. "Welcome to our humble circle. I am Alpha and I am really happy to finally welcome our missing guest personally."

With a nod, Alpha signalled to the only woman in the group who then closed the door and positioned herself in front of it.

"So you're the one who kept Beth, Dog and Ernie so busy—and fooling around. Another young lad like that, all due respect. But now the games are over. I'm glad you saw that too." Alpha stretched out his hand demandingly.

Pete knew what he wanted, but he couldn't resist reaching for Alpha's hand and shaking it. "Pleased to meet you. I'm Pete."

The blow came out of nowhere. Before he had even realized what had happened, the Second Investigator was lying on the ground with a painful jaw. Alpha had struck him down with a targeted hook. He stood threateningly above him and hissed, "I said the games are over!"

Groaning, Pete got back on his feet and rubbed his painful chin. "I don't have the Blue Diamond."

"Of course you do. Give it to me!"

"I don't have it," Pete repeated.

"You hid it in case we got our hands on you," Alpha suspected appreciatively. "Where is it?"

"I don't know."

"If you don't tell me out of your own free will, I'll beat it out of you!" Alpha threatened furiously.

"There's nothing to beat out of me. I'm telling you the truth. I gave the stone to someone else."

"Someone else? There's nobody left here!"

"Yes. The night watchman."

"The night watchman?" called the leader and opened his eyes in disbelief.

"I didn't know there was one either," Pete continued. "But he suddenly stood behind me and took the stone away. He wanted to put it in a safe place where you couldn't find it."

"You're lying," Alpha was convinced.

"No. When the guy had the diamond, he disappeared because your people were on my heels. I don't know where he is."

Alpha yanked a gun out of his jacket and pressed the barrel against Pete's forehead. "I'll count to three and then you tell me the truth!" he growled. "One!"

"I'm already telling you the truth!" Pete shouted nervously.

"Two!" He clicked the safety lever.

"You can believe him, Alpha!" Bob tried to stop him. "Pete's not the type to lie to you! Listen to me!"

"Really, Mr... Mr... Alpha! I don't know where the diamond is," begged the Second Investigator. "Three!" The finger slowly pulled the trigger. "You had your chance!"

"No!" Pete yelled and closed his eyes. "I..."

There was a click.

Pete opened his eyes.

"So you're telling the truth after all." Alpha smiled and lowered the weapon. "I always remove a bullet from the magazine, especially for these cases. But I'm warning you—the next shot is gonna be hot."

He turned to his colleagues, who had watched everything in silence. "Why didn't anyone know anything about a night watchman?"

"I have no idea, Alpha," Dog replied nervously. "The 'Voice' didn't mention it, did he?"

"The 'Voice' assured me there was no one!" cried Alpha. "And of course you didn't even see the shadow of a night watchman in your search, did you?"

"No... no, we—" Dog began to reply.

"Where is he? Why are there so many people walking around here that we don't know anything about? There are four of them now! How many more are hiding in this damn museum?"

Pete took a quick look over at Bob, who almost imperceptibly shook his head.

"Find him!" Alpha ordered furiously. "Search every corner of this building! Not only the exhibition rooms, but also the offices. He can hide anywhere. What are you waiting for?"

The three of them hastily left the room.

Suddenly Alpha shouted, "Stop! I'll go with you. Dog, you stay here and guard our friends. And I warn you, under no circumstances let them out of your sight. These guys are smarter than they look."

He shot past them quickly and went away with the search team. Dog, the man with the bulldog face, stood at the door with his gun drawn.

Bob and Pete looked after them in uncertainty. They both thought the same thing. If Alpha really wanted to search every corner of the museum, he would sooner or later look in the lift shaft.

## 11. 10:20 pm—Gotcha!

“Barefoot?” Bob asked in amazement and pointed at Pete’s feet. “Where are your shoes?”

“It’s a long story,” Pete replied. “What have they done to Mr Peacock?”

“He wanted to run away. Alpha knocked him out. Just be careful with him. He’s pretty harmless most of the time, but when he freaks out...”

“I noticed that as well,” Pete said and rubbed his still aching chin. “I thought that—”

“Hey!” Dog snapped. “Shut up!”

“Why?” Pete asked. “We can...”

“I said shut up!” Dog pointed his gun at them and made it unmistakably clear to them how serious he meant.

They kept quiet. Pete took a cautious look at the console, and saw the intercom buttons. Suddenly he realized how Bob ingeniously let Jupiter and Worthington hear the conversations in the security office. So by now, the First Investigator would have heard that the burglars wanted to turn the whole museum upside down. But what use was that to Jupe if he couldn’t get out of the lift cabin?

The two detectives sat down and looked around the office despite the dim lighting. Bob kept kneeling next to Mr Peacock, feeling his pulse and forehead. The director seemed fine. He was just unconscious.

“Can’t you even sit still!” Dog got annoyed with Bob. “He’s okay. You just sit down!”

Dog seemed nervous as he alternately peered in and out of the corridor and stepped from one leg to the other. Then Dog looked at his watch and revealed the reason for his nervousness. “I have to pee. Stay where you are! I’ll be right back!” He raised the gun threateningly once more, walked out of the room and closed the door.

Bob and Pete looked at each other surprised, but Dog took precautions. They heard something being pushed against the door. And when his foot steps went away, Bob tried to push the handle.

“He wedged the door,” Bob said. “Probably with a chair.”

“It works pretty well using chairs,” Pete nodded with a grin.

“Now that we are alone, we must take advantage of that!” Bob exclaimed.

“How?” Pete asked. “The door’s jammed, the window’s barred. We can’t get out of here!”

“Jupe!” Bob cried. “He must have thought of something! We can speak to him through the intercom!”

Bob pushed the desk calendar aside and spoke on the intercom: “Jupe? We’re alone right now. Can you hear me? Push the ‘Talk’ button to speak to us.”

Then he pulled the self-made wedge out of the ‘Talk’ button to release it so that the lift occupants could communicate.

“Yes, I hear you very clearly,” Jupe replied.

“Our guard may be back soon,” Bob said. “Have you been listening?”

“Everything. But what do you expect me to do now?”

“A plan. What else?”

Jupiter sighed. "You're really funny, Bob. I don't have a plan. I'm stuck down here. But tell me, the guy who was guarding you and is now in the toilet, does he look familiar to you?"

"No. Should he?"

"I don't know. I feel like I know his voice. I've been trying to assign a face to him all along, but I just can't think of anything. I thought you'd recognize him."

"No. What about you, Pete?" Bob turned to Pete.

Now the Second Investigator came to the intercom. "Now that you say it, he seems suspicious to me too, Juve. There's something funny about him. I just don't know what."

"I'm afraid that won't get us anywhere," Juve said. "Is there really no way to get the door open?"

"Even if I did," Bob said again. "Dog would hear that right away."

"And believe me," Pete added, "it's no fun running for hours through this museum. We wouldn't get far."

"Unless you take a path that no one expects so quickly," Jupiter thought and pinched his lower lip.

"And what kind of way is that?" Pete asked.

"This is a modern building. And a building whose windows cannot be opened. So there must be a good ventilation system. Do you happen to see an air duct in the office?"

A surprised outcry from Pete was the answer. "Oh man, Juve, you're a genius! There's actually an air shaft! You wouldn't fit through, but that shouldn't be a problem for us!"

"All right," Bob said quickly. "Dog will be back any minute. We must hurry. I'll put the wedge back on the 'Talk' button so you can keep listening. We'll try to get out of here somehow! See you later!"

Bob pressed the 'Talk' button and pushed the wedge in between, and put the desk calendar to cover the red lamp.

"Stop!" Jupiter shouted. "Stop! Wait! Bob? Pete?"

There was no answer. "Damn!" moaned the First Investigator.

"What is it?" Worthington asked. "What else did you want to tell them?"

"I just thought of it!" shouted Jupiter. "Goodness, this changes everything!"

"What is it?" Worthington repeated the question.

"Just as Bob was talking about their guardian, this Dog, it suddenly struck me," Jupiter explained. "I now know where I heard his voice! I know who that is!"

Bob had gotten on the chair to get to the air shaft. The ventilation grille was screwed to the ceiling. "Give me the scissors on the desk," he said. "I should be able to unscrew the screws with it, they're not very tight. Quick!"

Pete gave it to him. "Damn, there's not enough time. Dog would be back here any second! He should be done peeing by now. I'll keep watch."

Pete put his ear to the door. No footsteps were heard yet. "Hurry up, Bob!"

"What do you think I'm doing!" Bob snapped. "We need more time! We have to lock the door or something!"

Bob suddenly stopped and lowered his scissors. "Idiot!"

"What is it? Why don't you go on?" Bob jumped off the chair and pressed the scissors into Pete's hand. "Here! You go do it!"

"What are you up to?" Pete asked, puzzled.

"This!" Bob triumphantly pulled the big bunch of keys out of his pocket. "I'll lock the door!"

“You have the keys? Why didn’t you say that right away,” Pete shouted as he climbed onto the chair and tampered with the ventilation grille.

“I forgot. I just don’t know which one’s the right one.” He randomly tried the first key. He didn’t fit. Then the second—nothing. He didn’t succeed in the third either. “What a bummer, there are over twenty keys!”

While Pete laboriously loosened one screw after the other and Bob tried all the keys, they kept on listening whether someone was coming. But in the corridor, it stayed quiet. With key number seventeen, Bob finally succeeded. “It fits! Dog won’t be coming back to this office anytime soon. Are you ready, Pete? We should get out of here!”

“In a minute,” Pete said as he loosened the last screw and took the grille off the ceiling. He could see a pitch-black, rectangular tunnel about sixty centimetres high lay in front of them.

“It’s going to be tight,” Pete said as he swung skilfully into the opening.

Bob threw the loosened screws into the trash, put the chair in its old place and took a last look at Mr Peacock. “I hope you wake up soon,” he whispered.

Then he let Pete pull him into the air shaft. Once he got through, Bob replaced the grille from the inside the shaft in order to mislead Dog as long as possible. After a breakneck turn in the narrow shaft he finally succeeded. “Come on, Pete!”

The Second Investigator crawled on all fours through the narrow shaft. He literally saw nothing. Only every few metres did a few faint rays of dusky light fall from the lattice openings that led to other offices. The shaft had many bends and crossed other shafts.

Each time Pete arbitrarily decided which bend he took. “Where are we going anyway?” he whispered after a while. He had the feeling that he had already covered more than fifty metres.

“I don’t know,” Bob confessed, crawling right behind him.

“As far away from the security office as possible, so Dog won’t hear us when he gets back.”

At that moment, a noise penetrated his ear. Somebody shouted something, a dull thump echoed through the metal tunnel. “Speaking of the devil. That should be him,” Bob quipped. “I guess he just realized we locked him out.”

They crawled on, until Bob said after a few minutes: “That should be enough. Find a way out.”

“You’re funny. There are plenty of exits here. Which one shall we take?”

“Best would be one that leads into an office. We can think over our next steps undisturbed.”

“It looks good here,” Pete said after a few metres and peered into a dark and deserted office. He wanted to remove the ventilation grille, but immediately he groaned as if in pain. “We’re so stupid, Bob! Of course the grilles are screwed everywhere from the outside! How are we supposed to get out of here now?”

“Gosh!” Bob exclaimed. “I hadn’t thought of that with all the excitement.”

“Great. Now what?” Pete asked.

“Maybe brute force might help.” Bob supported himself with his back on the top of the shaft and pressed his legs against the grille. The bars didn’t move. Bob kicked it carefully. It clattered.

“Are you crazy?” Pete hissed. “You can hear that for miles! Especially through this ventilation shaft!”

As if that had been a cue, suddenly a shot tore the silence apart. The two of them held their breath until Bob understood who had fired the shot.

“Dog attacked the lock,” Bob suspected. “Now he’s standing in the office wondering where we’ve gone. And sooner or later, he’ll get it. So we don’t have time to lose, noise or no noise.”

He now kicked with all his might. At the fourth kick, the grille with its screws flew out and crashed onto the floor. Without hesitation, Bob slipped out of the shaft and jumped down. Pete followed him. When Bob carefully pressed the handle, he realized that the door was also locked. But he had the keys. Little by little, he tried them out. This time he was luckier, as number nine fit.

“What do we do when we run into Alpha and company?” Pete asked anxiously.

“We won’t,” Bob promised. “I’m sure they all heard the shot and they’re either in the security office or on their way there. They’re gonna think for a while about how we got out of there. And then they make a plan to catch us again. During this time we can move freely. My goodness, we’re going back and forth!”

Pete snapped his fingers when something good occurred to him. “We go to Jupe, second floor lift landing. He’s eavesdropping on the gang, and he can tell us what their plans are.”

“Brilliant!” Bob opened the door and carefully peered out into a dark corridor.

“The air is clear,” he whispered. “Let’s go!”

## 12. 10:36 pm—The Secret of the Night Watchman

The shot banged deafeningly loud through the lift cabin. Jupiter twitched. “My goodness!” he gasped.

“Now he’s shot the door open. I hope Bob and Pete have come far enough not to be found.”

“I hope so, too. These guys don’t seem to shy away from anything,” Worthington replied. “I blame myself. If I hadn’t picked up Mr Peacock, you wouldn’t have been in this position.”

“If you hadn’t picked up Mr Peacock, the ‘Fire of the Moon’ would probably have been lost forever,” Jupiter contradicted.

“I have put you in danger,” Worthington insisted. “It’s just not right to drive guests if you haven’t dropped others off safely at their destination yet. I’ve never done anything like this before.”

“We gave our consent when you asked if you could pick up the director. Now stop blaming yourself. We really have more important things to do.”

Worthington cleared his throat. “You’re right, Jupiter. Hopefully Pete and Bob will make it this far so you can share your amazing insights with them. I really have respect for your combination of powers of observation and sharp senses. I myself would never have thought that Dog was anything but—”

“Shh!” Jupiter interrupted him. From the intercom, someone had left the office in a hurry. “Now he has understood that no one is hiding under the table or behind the door, and he is going to get the others. Hopefully he won’t stumble across Bob and Pete by accident.”

They waited in silence for a few minutes, then they heard the familiar sound above them—someone opened the lift door.

“Jupe? It’s us!”

“Bob!” Jupe cried. “Thank goodness!”

“Have they gone back to the office yet? Did you hear them?” Bob asked.

“No. Dog has gone off to get the others,” Jupiter replied. “But I have other news that will interest you.”

“Jupe, please get to the point!” Pete urged. “We really don’t have time for awkward talk. They’ll be looking for us any minute.”

“All right, then. I’ll save the details of my conclusions. Here are the results—there’s no night watchman.”

“Excuse me?” Pete asked, puzzled.

“The man posing as the night watchman is Dog.”

“What?” Bob shouted in surprise. “Dog? But from where—”

“After overhearing his conversation with Pete at where you are now, I recognized his voice again when I heard him through the intercom,” Jupe explained. “That’s what seemed so familiar to me—his voice, nothing else. That’s why I couldn’t think of a face.”

“But the gang would have the stone by then,” Pete remarked. “Why—”

“Wrong. Dog has it,” Jupe continued. “He wants to betray Alpha and keep the diamond to himself! He posed as a night watchman so that nobody would suspect him. It was so dark you didn’t recognize him. But that’s not all. I also know where the stone is now.”



"I thought you just said that Dog has it," Pete said, puzzled.

"I don't think he's that stupid, carrying it around in his pocket. Sooner or later Alpha may suspect—especially if there's no night watchman to be found far and wide—and then search his people. No, Dog hid it."

"But it won't do him any good," Pete disagreed. "At some point, he must finally take back the diamond."

"Yes, another day," Jupe replied. "But not tonight."

"You mean he wants to break into here again? Without the others?"

"No. He'll come back as a regular museum visitor and get the stone. So he hid it in a place that's easily accessible to every visitor."

There was a moment of silence.

"Where's that?" Pete wanted to know.

"The toilet. That's why he just went there. He didn't really have to go to the toilet. Rather, it occurred to him at that moment that the toilet is a surefire hideout. Probably he taped the diamond under a sink or put it in a cistern or something similar—a place where even a cleaning lady can't see."

"My goodness, Jupe!" Bob shouted. "That sounds so logical, it's creepy already. I hope you're right."

"I admit, the matter of the toilet is an unproven speculation. But the night watchman seemed strange to me from the beginning. I'm sure there isn't one. Mr Peacock would be able to verify this but he is out now. As far as I suspect, Dog is the culprit, one hundred percent!"

"All well and good," Pete said. "But what do we do with this knowledge?"

"Nothing for now. You've got to get out of here. Bob, you have a key. Try to get to the other stairwell without going through the foyer. Take the door we came in through."

"All right, Jupe," Bob said. "And what about you?"

"At some point, the crooks will put the power back on," Jupiter said. "Then we'll finally get out of here. And if necessary, we'll wait till morning. Neither Aunt Mathilda nor my stomach will be happy about that, but there is probably no other possibility. Now get out of here! Good luck!"

"All right, Jupe! See you soon!" The door was closed and there was silence again. But only for a moment.

Then voices came out of the intercom. "They couldn't possibly have disappeared!" Alpha cursed.

"I'm sorry, Alpha," Dog's voice resounded in a whiny note. "I really didn't want to—"

"No, I'm sure you didn't. But you let them get away!"

"I've wedged the chair tight!"

"And then you just disappeared and disobeyed my orders!" Alpha yelled. "I told you not to let them out of your sight! This can't be happening! We run like clowns through this museum in search of a non-existent night watchman and two cheeky guys! The fact that our dear Mr Director is still sleeping blissfully is probably pure coincidence. I'll tell you something, Dog, this thing has consequences for you! Very great consequences!" He growled like an irritated wolf. "How did they get out?"

"Alpha?" That was Ernie's voice. "Look, up there!"

Jupiter and Worthington held their breath.

"An air shaft," Alpha said calmly and then shouted: "An air shaft! They crawled through that damn thing!"

Now all that could be heard was raging screams. Something clattered and cracked. Apparently Alpha dismantled half the office interior.

“What is this?” Alpha said suddenly. “That red light there! Why is there power for this?” And then Jupiter felt an ice-cold shiver through his body.

“This is the intercom for the lift,” Beth replied.

“I can see that,” Alpha said with threatening calm. “These smart boys! They’ve set up a voice connection to eavesdrop on us. Too bad I noticed. Now we know where they are—the lift! A hiding place so good I wouldn’t have figured it out for a few hours.

“Ernie, this time you guard the fat guy. Beth and Dog, follow me. There are four lift landings. Ceewee is already at the ground floor. Dog, you take the first floor, Beth, second and I’ll go to the third. They won’t get away from us again!”

“But Jupe told us to leave immediately!” Pete hissed as he followed Bob down the hall.

“Since when do you do what Jupe says?” Bob asked mockingly.

“Since I agree with him. I want to get out of here as fast as I can! They’re probably looking for us again!”

“Pete, understand—maybe Jupiter is wrong and Dog might take the stone with him now, not tomorrow or in the next few days. Then we stand here looking stupid—criminals escape, Blue Diamond gone. No, we have to take the stone with us when we leave. At least we can be sure Alpha and the others will still be here when the police arrive. Without the ‘Fire of the Moon’, they won’t go away—not after these hassles.”

“You’re funny. And who will take care of the pain I have suffered?”

“Well, don’t act like that, Pete. We’ll be gone in a minute. If I’m not wrong, there should be toilets on all the four floors. Which one should we go to?”

“Should be the nearest from the security office. That should be the third floor toilets,” Pete said. “We’re on the second floor now. Let’s go!”

They ran up the stairs quietly and reached the main corridor of the third floor. The orientation signs, which could still be seen in the semi-darkness, had shown them the way. Bob pushed the men’s toilet door open and entered.

“Let’s find it.” He bent over and examined the washbasins as Pete went to the stalls. There were six of them.

Pete went into the first stall. Jupiter had talked about the cisterns. The plastic lid was easy to remove, but Pete saw nothing glittering in it but the water. There was also nothing elsewhere in the stall. He then went from one stall to the next.

Finally Pete came out of the last stall. “I can’t find anything. What about you?”

Bob shook his head.

“Jupe must have been wrong,” Pete remarked. “Damn it. Jupe makes one mistake every hundred years, but does it have to be now?”

“Did you really check all the cisterns?” Bob asked.

“Yeah, that’s what I did.”

“Did you put your hand in the water, I mean.”

“In the water? I’m not putting my hand in there!”

“So you just took one look?” Bob asked, annoyed. “Pete, we’re looking for a diamond! It’s almost invisible in the water. We’ve had a similar case like this before, remember?” He was referring to a similar situation in *The Mystery of the Invisible Dog*.

“All right, let’s take another look,” Bob said.

“But this is a toilet!” Pete protested.

Bob twisted his eyes. “My goodness! It’s just normal plumbing water in the cisterns. It only gets nasty below.”

Bob entered a stall, lifted off the lid of the cistern and put his hand into it. He found what he was looking for in the second stall. Triumphantly, he pulled out the great gem.

“Wow! The ‘Fire of the Moon’,” Bob remarked. “It’s funny, I kind of imagined it to be... more spectacular.”

“It’s dark here,” Pete remarked curtly. “Now let’s get out of here!”

“All right,” Bob agreed. “I’ve been in this museum long enough for my taste.”

They left the toilet and stepped out into the corridor.

“The entrance to the stairwell is at the end of the corridor,” Bob whispered and set himself in motion. They walked past the main staircase, but nothing moved there. However, the corridor was very long. They were still about thirty metres away to the end when suddenly, the door there opened.

Even in the darkness they recognized the silhouette that stood there—Alpha. It only took him a moment to recover from his surprise, then he ran towards them.

“Damn!” cried Pete and he pulled Bob into another corridor. After a few steps the corridor made a bend—and ended in a dead end. There was a door there, but it was locked.

“Bob! The keys!” Bob pulled out the waistband and tried to open the lock with trembling fingers.

“Come on, come on!” Pete pushed. “He’ll be here any second!”

“Why does he have to put so many stupid keys on this? Ah! This fits!” With one click the lock gave way. Bob pushed the door open, they slipped through and closed it again.

“Lock the door!” Pete exclaimed.

“I’m trying to—” That was as far as Bob went. The door slammed against his head and threw him to the ground. Pete looked in panic for an escape route, but there was none—just barred windows and one exit.

Alpha stood in the doorway pointing his flashlight at them. “You fellas!” he gasped. “I finally got you. That’s the last time you made a fool of me!”

Bob struggled to get up. “What... what are you going to do now?”

“What am I going to do? With you?” Alpha smirked. “Nothing. Except I’ll shoot you if you don’t help me.”

“Help?” Pete asked irritably. “Help you to do what?”

“To find the stone. Or rather, the one who hid it.”

“But... we don’t know where the night watchman is,” Pete asserted. “I already told you that!”

“There is no night watchman!” Alpha barked. “You know that as well as I do.”

“Why isn’t there a night watchman?” Bob played the surprised one. “Pete saw him, didn’t he?”

Alpha shook his head with a smile. “You guys are just too smart. I’m sure you’ve seen through this absurd game better than anyone. But I’m not an idiot either. One of my people is betraying me. He played the night watchman for you.

“And I can’t get rid of the feeling that you know very well who that is.”

### 13. 10:49 pm—Cross-Examination

There was breathless silence. Alpha's opening had completely surprised them. Bob feverishly considered what he should answer. Then he realized that he had already hesitated too long. But maybe the truth was their only way out. A dispute within the gang distracted their attention from everything else.

"Dog," Bob finally said. "It's Dog. It was dark, but Pete recognized him by his voice."

Alpha's eyes narrowed. "Dog!" he gasped. "I knew it! I knew it! That traitor!" He growled like a hungry wolf, his breath went faster and faster—and suddenly stopped. Alpha ripped open his eyes and scanned his jacket for the inhaler. Trembling, he pulled it out and put it to his mouth.

Pete jumped forward and knocked the device out of Alpha's hand. It flew in a high arc through the room and landed in the darkness. The gang leader stared at him in horror, but was unable to move.

Pete then shoved Alpha to the ground. His gun dropped from his hand.

"Get out of here!" Pete shouted, pulled Bob with him and jumped through the door. He slammed the door. "Come on, lock up!"

"Pete!" Bob said approvingly as he turned the key. "That was a masterstroke! Even surprised me."

"Me too," the Second Investigator replied uncertainly. "Let's get out of here!"

But as they turned the corner, they encountered a nasty surprise—Beth and Dog were expecting them with their weapons drawn.

"The game of cat-and-mouse is over," Beth said, "finally."

A deafening bang made everyone flinch. Bob and Pete looked back. The door they had just locked was ripped open and Alpha stormed out. He had shot the lock. Surprised, he looked at them, then he saw his cronies.

"Finally you're in the right place at the right time," he grumbled. "Take the boys with you! We're going back to the security office!"

"What happened?" Beth asked irritably.

"I'll tell you later. Come on, upstairs!"

"And the night watchman?" Beth asked.

Alpha grinned maliciously and pushed Bob and Pete forward roughly towards the main staircase. "I know a surefire way to catch him."

When they reached the security office, Mr Peacock lay unchanged on the floor.

"So you got them," Ernie said, satisfied. "What happens to them now?"

"Nothing," Alpha replied. "These boys are always causing trouble, but are not important for the time being. More important is the night watchman."

"Did you find him?" Ernie wanted to know.

"Not quite yet. But we are on the right track," Alpha said confidently and seemingly in a good mood. "I have a plan."

He positioned himself in front of the entrance so that nobody could leave the room. He stretched out his hand demandingly.

"Dog, give me your gun."

“Why do you need—”

“Don’t ask!”

Hesitantly, Dog handed him his gun.

“That was part one of my plan,” Alpha said.

Pete took an unobtrusive look at Dog, who had turned pale even in the dim lighting.

“And now comes part two.” Alpha clicked the safety lever, took two quick steps towards Dog and pushed him against the wall causing Bob to quickly dodge. The leader grabbed Dog by the collar and held the barrel of the gun under his chin.

“Get it out!” he hissed.

“Alpha!” shouted Beth in horror. “What are you doing?”

“Dog’s our night watchman!” yelled Alpha. “He betrayed us!”

“What... what are you talking about,” Dog stuttered and tried to smile. “Why should I—”

“Don’t bother, the boy recognized you by your voice.” In a nutshell, Alpha summarized the situation for Beth and Ernie. Then he turned back to the pale traitor. “Why did you do that? Did you really believe you’d get away with the stone without us noticing?”

“I...” Dog began.

“Did you really believe that?” Alpha growled.

“I... had a client,” Dog finally confessed. “He promised me twice the money I would have gotten from you.”

“Who?” Alpha wanted to know in an icy voice. “Who told you to betray us?”

Shining sweat stood on Dog’s forehead and he swallowed heavily before saying: “The ‘Voice’. It was the ‘Voice’.”

“Say that again?” Alpha exclaimed, surprised.

“The ‘Voice’ gave me the order,” Dog repeated.

“So you’re in cahoots with him. Then you also know who is hiding behind the ‘Voice’,” Alpha suspected. “Tell me.”

“I don’t know,” Dog stammered.

“Who?” Alpha screamed that everyone was shrugging and pushed the gun a little harder under his former partner’s chin.

“I don’t know!” Dog pleaded. “The ‘Voice’ called me, just like he called you. He asked me if I wanted to earn a little more with the action and offered me double if I could somehow bring the ‘Fire of the Moon’ to him.”

“Why?” Alpha asked. “Why did the ‘Voice’ try to play us off against each other?”

“That’s quite clear,” Bob interrupted the interrogation. He had listened eagerly and had already put together a theory.

“Shut up!” Beth shouted at Bob and waved her gun at him.

“No, Beth, let the boy talk. These guys are ten times smarter than all of you put together, otherwise they wouldn’t have been able to fool you for that long. I want to hear what he has to say.”

Beth’s face darkened, but she remained silent.

“So tell me, boy,” Alpha said. “What’s going on in your head.”

“Well,” Bob began hesitantly, “the ‘Voice’ gave you the order to steal the ‘Fire of the Moon’, because he knew that five people were needed to get into the museum. But five people mean five times the payment. It is much easier to instruct one member of the group to deceive the others. The ‘Voice’ have to offer him more money, but that’s still better than paying five people.”

“But we had agreed on a place of delivery with the ‘Voice’,” Ernie said.

“Me too,” Dog confessed. “One day earlier. The plan was that I try to take the stone and get to the ‘Voice’ before you do. Then he would not have appeared at the agreed time with you.”

Alpha snorted furiously. “These countless unforeseen incidents have made it easy for you, of course. But from now on, there won’t be any more incidents. And as for you, Dog, I’ll be very careful how I react to your betrayal. And then I’ll think of a nice surprise for the man behind the ‘Voice’. But before I do, I want to finally hold the ‘Fire of the Moon’ in my hands. Where did you hide the diamond?”

When Dog didn’t answer immediately, Alpha grabbed him tighter and yelled at him, “Where, traitor?”

“In the toilet,” Dog said meekly. “On the third floor. The water tank in the second stall from the right.”

“Very clever of you,” Alpha quipped. “You probably would have taken it as a normal visitor in the next few days.”

Dog didn’t answer. “Fine. Beth and Ernie, don’t let him out of your sight! And the two boys. If you fail again, this night will have consequences for you! I’ll go get the stone now.” He looked sharply at everyone present, then left the office and hurried down the corridor.

As soon as he was out of sight and hearing distance, Dog turned angrily to Bob and Pete. “I have you to thank for that!” he hissed. And suddenly he grabbed the Second Investigator and took a swing at him. Pete was just able to fend him off.

“Dog!” screamed Ernie. “Let him go!” He intervened and separated the two of them.

“What are you doing?” Dog asked angrily. “Whose side are you on, Ernie? These two guys got us into all this trouble! Without them—”

“Without them, you would have got away with your treachery,” Beth said. “And then you ask whose side we’re on.”

The argument went on, but Pete and Bob didn’t listen anymore. They feverishly considered what Alpha would do if he discovered that the Blue Diamond was not where it was supposed to be. He’d never guess that Bob had it in his pocket. Dog was in serious trouble. It took five minutes, then Alpha came back. Not rage breathing but with quick steps as expected, he was calm and serene with a smile on his face.

“Show it to us!” Beth demanded. “At least I want to see what we got for all this trouble. I hope the stone is worth it.”

Alpha didn’t answer. He walked straight towards Dog and hit him in the face with his fist. He fell to the ground groaning.

“Never do that again!” Alpha growled and kicked him in the stomach. “Never again, do you hear? Where’s the stone? And this time I want to hear the truth!”

“But what is it?” Ernie began.

“It wasn’t in the cisterns,” Alpha screamed. “It’s not there. Come on, let’s hear it!”

“It must be there!” Dog gasped, scared and crouching in pain. “Really, Alpha, I hid it there!”

“The truth!” Alpha growled, pointed the gun at his victim and released the safety catch. “You know the game, Dog. Only this time there’s actually a bullet in it. One!”

“I swear it to you!” Dog pleaded.

“Two!”

Dog just whimpered.

“Stop!” Bob shouted and stepped forward.

“Don’t interfere, boy,” Alpha whispered angrily at him. “You’ve caused enough trouble already.”

"I've got the stone!" Bob pulled it out of his pocket and held it up to Alpha.

The leader stared spellbound at the shimmering diamond. "You!" He turned to Bob as Dog breathed a sigh of relief and slowly rose.

Alpha grabbed the stone. "Of course. How could it have been otherwise? You damn boys must have your fingers in everything. How did you get the stone?"

"Well," Bob stuttered, "we figured that Dog went to the toilet for more than one reason and we went there and found it."

Alpha first looked at Bob silently without expression, and then at Pete. He didn't say a word for a long time. Bob became queasy. Alpha's thoughts could not be guessed, but his silence promised nothing good.

Finally, the leader asked quietly: "Who are you two?"

"What do you mean?" Bob asked.

"Who are you? None of this is a coincidence."

"I... I don't understand," Bob stammered.

"You show up here even though you're not supposed to be here. You let my people stumble through this museum like a bunch of complete idiots and you saw through the game before I even realized it was a game. What's behind it?"

"Uh... Nothing," Bob said. "Coincidence."

"Logic," Pete added, thinking that Jupiter probably had to grin in his hiding place now.

Alpha was not satisfied with any of the answers, but he asked no more questions.

He held up the 'Fire of the Moon' and shone his flashlight on it. He turned it back and forth looking closely, and weighed it in his hand. Then he held the stone between two fingers and blew hot air on it, and looked closely again.

In a soundless voice, he finally said: "This is not the 'Fire of the Moon'."

"Excuse me?" Beth asked, surprised.

"This is nothing but a piece of glass. A fake."

## 14. 11:07 pm—Nothing but the Truth

“A fake!” Jupiter shouted. He couldn’t believe his ears. He and Worthington had been tracking everything that had happened in the office.

When Alpha discovered the intercom was switched on, Worthington had closed the roof hatch as quickly as possible to remain undetected at least at first glance. In the heat of the moment, Alpha had forgotten and left the intercom on and did not remove Bob’s wedge on the ‘Talk’ button. Eventually it did not matter to him because the three burglars did not find anyone at the lift landings. Also, after Alpha ran into Pete and Bob, he wouldn’t have suspected that there was someone in the lift cabin.

Jupiter had specifically told Pete and Bob to leave immediately! But perhaps it had been quite wise of them to first get the stone from its hiding place. Unfortunately, that didn’t help them now.

Jupiter and Worthington were lucky. Not only did they remain undetected, they were also able to continue to follow events in the security office. But Jupiter was left speechless by Alpha’s discovery.

“I didn’t do it!” Dog quickly assured Alpha.

“I believe you even though you’ve lost all my trust,” Alpha replied. “Somebody’s playing a really bad game with us. And I have a feeling you guys know more than me again.”

“We?” Pete shouted, startled. “No!”

“Is that the stone you took?”

“I think so,” Pete stammered. “I wondered why it looked so boring. But I thought it was the light.”

“And you’re sure you don’t know about it anymore?” Alpha asked.

“Yes! I... we got in here absolutely by accident!” Pete asserted. “I don’t know anything about a fake!”

“Then I guess there’s only one person who can tell us more about it,” Alpha said. “Our dear director.”

“The one you took out,” Bob quipped.

“Shut up!” Alpha shouted. “Beth, go downstairs and get some water. We’ll wake the director up.”

Footsteps faded, then it stayed silent for a while.

“The ‘Fire of the Moon’ is a fake,” Jupiter thought out loud. “Someone must have replaced the stone—just who and when and why? Was it the sheikh, who actually owns the diamond because he doesn’t trust the museum’s security systems? What about the museum administration for the same reasons? Or one of the employees who immediately got on a plane to Rio with the real stone? Maybe it was Dog who is playing very high stakes or knows his boss so well that he would never really shoot. I wouldn’t be so sure about that, though. Bob and Pete had the stone last, but they couldn’t have replaced it. Where would they get a fake?”

“There’s another possibility,” Worthington interjected, who had taken a liking to solving this case.



“What’s that?”

“Alpha lied and the stone is real,” Worthington quipped.

“Fascinating idea, Worthington,” praised Jupiter. “Maybe Alpha now wants to betray his people and pretend the stone is worthless to keep it to himself. It’s as if he got that idea from how Dog wanted to deceive him in the first place. But then why would he wake the director?”

“To perfect the deception.”

“I just hope Alpha doesn’t freak out again. I think he’s quite capable of shooting someone. I wonder what he’s up to with Bob and Pete, when it’s all over?”

It was exactly this question that the two detectives thought as they silently waited for Beth’s return. The director had been unconscious for two hours. Bob was hoping he’d wake up, unless he was in a coma and had to go to the hospital right away.

Alpha wandered restlessly up and down the room again. Dog and Ernie avoided looking at him directly. They probably knew when it was better to be silent. After five minutes, Beth came back. In her hand she carried a bucket of water. Without hesitation, Alpha grabbed it and poured the contents into Mr Peacock’s face. With a frightened wheeze the director drove up and looked around confused.

“My dear Mr Director,” said Alpha in a velvety voice. “How nice to welcome you back to this world. You wouldn’t have been awake all this time listening to us, would you?”

“I…” he gasped, “I don’t know… what you’re talking about. No, not at all.”

“All right, then I’ll explain it to you,” Alpha continued, as Peacock scrambled to his feet and wiped his face with his handkerchief. “We’ve made progress in the last two hours. Look!” He held the fake diamond before his eyes.

“The ‘Fire of the Moon’!” Mr Peacock whispered respectfully. “What more do you want from us? You have the stone, don’t you?”

“Not at all,” Alpha disagreed. “And you know that as well as I do. Anyone with any idea of gems will recognize this thing as a cheap imitation.”

“An imitation? No way! Impossible!” Mr Peacock exclaimed.

Alpha smiled and pressed the stone into the director’s hand. “You’re welcome to see for yourself.”

Mr Peacock looked at the stone closely, turned it between his fingers and held it up to the flashlight. Then he shook his head. “That’s the ‘Fire of the Moon’, yes, most definitely,” he affirmed. “Its blue colour makes the diamond seem more inconspicuous than it is. Look, it looks much duller than a typical diamond, but no doubt the stone is real. No doubt about it, really!”

Still smiling, Alpha took the supposed diamond from his hand and said, “Then I’d like to demonstrate something to you.”

He whirled around and walked towards a window. He held up the stone and scratched it across the window pane. “Look! A genuine diamond will scratch glass. This is not the most reliable test because well-made fakes could still scratch glass. But this junk here cannot even make a mark on the window pane. This is a very bad fake.”

Horried, Peacock stared at the leader of the gang. “A fake? But that can’t be possible!”

Alpha’s face darkened. “Stop the game, Mr Director. Where’s the real Blue Diamond?”

Mr Peacock looked confused at Bob and Pete, then over to Alpha again. “That’s the real diamond! The sheikh brought us the stone himself! He has to—”

“I don’t believe a word you say!” Alpha snarled, rudely pushed Mr Peacock against the desk. “You’re behind this! I don’t know how or why, but you’re the key to the whole thing!”

“Me? But I’m just the director of this museum! Yeah, just the director. I only run the museum, you know. Why would I be the key to anything? Yeah, why?”

Once again Alpha pulled out his gun and pointed it at Mr Peacock. Regretfully, he shook his head.

“I really don’t like getting your beautiful suit dirty, my dear director, but I’m afraid there’s some ugly red spots you can’t avoid if you don’t tell me the truth right away.”

“What truth? I don’t know the truth!” Mr Peacock stuttered. “I don’t know what you’re talking about! I haven’t the faintest idea, no, I really haven’t! What do you want from me? Why do you suspect innocent people? It’s not my fault the stone isn’t real! You have to believe me! I—”

“The truth!” screamed Alpha. “No hysterical stuff!” Clicking, he unlocked the safety lever. “You have three seconds. One!”

## 15. 11:18 pm—The Confession

“All right!” shouted Mr Peacock in a roaring voice. “All right! I’ll tell you!”

Alpha put the gun away and smiled contentedly. “That’s what I wanted to hear.”

“You?” Pete shouted in disbelief and reaped a poke on his ribs from Bob. But the Second Investigator continued: “You really have something to do with it, don’t you?”

Mr Peacock nodded to pieces. “Yes. I have exchanged the stone.”

“Why?” Alpha asked.

“The museum... isn’t as safe as most people think,” Mr Peacock said. “Not half as safe. The alarm system is hopelessly out of date. With modern technology and the necessary knowledge it is not so difficult to break in here, no, not a problem at all. But we know that by now.”

“And?” Alpha asked impatiently as the director paused.

“I was too scared. The ‘Fire of the Moon’ is the most valuable exhibit the Steadman Museum has ever had, and it is small enough to steal easily. I switched it so as not to take any chances. If there were a theft in this museum, we would not be able to cope with it. No, never!”

“But someone who knew about it would have noticed immediately,” Pete said.

“I don’t think so,” Mr Peacock replied. “No visitor comes closer than a metre to the showcase and the lighting distorts the visual impression. Perhaps nobody would have noticed it, not even an expert or the sheikh himself. No, not even him.”

“So we’ve been running after a worthless imitation all this time,” Beth groaned. “The ‘Voice’ won’t believe us! We must find the real stone!”

“That’s right, dear Beth,” said Alpha. “Where is it?” Mr Peacock didn’t answer.

Alpha lifted his weapon again. “Come on, Mr Director. My three-second offer is still valid.”

“All right, all right. I’ll tell you,” Mr Peacock said resignedly. “It’s... not here.”

“Then where?”

“At my house. In my safe.”

Sighing, Alpha lowered her shoulders. “All right. Then we’d better go there straight away.”

“You... You want to now?” Mr Peacock shouted and wiped his sweaty forehead with his handkerchief which was already soaking wet.

“What do you think? That I’m going home?” Alpha growled. He turned around and gave Beth and Ernie a sign. “Take him and Dog with you. Make sure they don’t go anywhere. Our bill has not yet been paid.”

“And what about us?” Bob asked timidly, because he had no hope that Alpha would simply forget them.

“You’re coming too.”

“But... but what are you gonna do to us?” Pete wanted to know.

“I’ll think about that. I’ll have enough time on the way. Come on, move it! Ceewee has been waiting half an eternity at the exit.” He directed his prisoners out of the room.

"I still have to get my personal organizer from my office!" Mr Peacock remembered while he was at the doorway.

Alpha shook his head laughing. "Don't be silly. You won't need it now, and tomorrow you'll have very different appointments anyway."

"But it's important! I need my organizer urgently, terribly urgently!" Mr Peacock pleaded.

"You're going to need an awful lot of luck terribly urgently when I decide what to do with you," Alpha shouted angrily. "Let's go!"

They walked down the hall to the main staircase. Bob and Pete felt the evil glances directed at them. It was too late to escape. Alpha and his people wouldn't let the two detectives fool them again, even if they now had twice as many prisoners to guard.

But there was still hope—Worthington and Jupiter had heard everything. Now all that mattered was that they were freed from the lift cabin. As casually as possible, Bob asked over his shoulder, "Will you turn the power back on now?"

"What for? It's enough if we just leave," Alpha returned.

"Damn!" Bob cursed inside. How would I get him to do it after all? He'll hardly accept any advice from me.

But then a thought came to Bob—he could make Alpha believe that the idea came from himself. Bob leaned over to Pete and whispered so loudly that Alpha could just hear him: "Maybe the city security service will come and see that no light is on in this building."

The Second Investigator had not understood Bob's trick and gave him a warning look. "Shh!" he hissed.

But Bob grinned contentedly. He might just have tricked Alpha, if he was lucky.

They went down the stairs and reached the foyer.

"There you are at last!" Ceewee shouted, patrolling the hall. "What had happened?"

"A lot," Beth narrowly replied.

"Dog? You're looking so funny," Ceewee remarked. "What—"

"Shut up!" Dog snapped at his former colleague.

"Do you have the stone?" Ceewee asked.

"Later, Ceewee!" warned Alpha. "We'll tell you everything on the way. Now we have to get out of here!"

The group started to move again. As they passed the lift door, Bob suddenly stumbled and fell to his knees.

"Come on, get up," Beth snapped.

"Yeah, yeah, all right," Bob muttered, getting up as awkwardly as possible. He tapped his pants off and tugged his suit.

"Get a move on!" Beth snapped again.

Bob kept going. They climbed over the metal railing at the ticket booth, reached the glass sliding doors and Ceewee went to open them. Cool night air struck against them. Even though they were still in captivity, Pete was happy to finally be out of this building. Only the absence of his shoes disturbed him on the cold stone slabs at the entrance.

No one was to be seen, only from the street they heard the noise of the cars. Los Angeles was still busy, but it wasn't very late either. The Second Investigator had the feeling that he had been in the museum for days, but it had only been three hours. His mother wouldn't miss him yet, because Pete had told her that he would be out late, and if with a little luck, they could end up at the premiere party of the movie.

"We should turn the power back on," said Alpha, "before someone takes a look through the glass door and wonders why the night lights are off."

“But there are only four of us left,” Beth threw in and gave Dog a dark look.

“The switches for connections two and three are near each other,” Alpha recalled. “Dog will help us again if he wants to get out of this alive.”

They compared their watches to the nearest second and agreed on a time at which all power connections should be restored. Beth, Ceewee and Ernie disappeared into the darkness, while Alpha and his prisoners went to two power boxes close to each other. They were easy to open and with a glance at their watches Alpha and Dog pressed two switches at the same time. The museum’s tinted windows flickered and finally shone in dull grey.

“That’s done for. Get to the van!” There was a dark blue van in the parking lot. Ceewee and Ernie got in the back with their prisoners, while Alpha and Beth took a seat in front. No one paid attention to the Rolls-Royce, which was parked nearby.

## 16. 11:29 pm—Never Take the Lift Again

A jerk went through the cabin, then a very quiet electric hum could be heard.

“What is this?” whispered Jupiter.

“Looks like we got power again,” Worthington said. “At least parts of the building.”

“Then why isn’t anything moving?” Jupiter asked. “It’s still dark.”

“Well, that might be because I didn’t turn the light bulbs back on,” Worthington said.

Jupiter hit his forehead with his flat hand. “Of course! Still, we’d have to move. Do you feel anything?”

“No. Probably something is still not working properly.”

“Could you maybe turn the lights back on?”

“Of course, Jupiter.” Worthington rose up and began to work, groping.

A few moments later, one of the light bulbs dangling from a loose cable shone. The sudden light dazzled the First Investigator painfully for a moment, but it was the most beautiful pain he could imagine. He smiled with relief. “Good to see you again, Worthington.”

“It’s nice to meet you.”

“So we have light. Then why isn’t this lift moving?” Jupiter pressed one of the buttons, but still nothing moved.

Worthington cleared his throat. “I think I know what is wrong,” he said and reached past Jupiter to the control panel. There he flipped a switch. It was the ‘Stop’ switch that Jupiter hectically worked on three hours ago. Instantly the lift started to move and glided upwards.

The First Investigator smiled apologetically. “I have forgotten about that ‘Stop’ switch! Finally the lift moves!”

“We’re just going the wrong way,” Worthington remarked. “It’s going up.”

Jupiter shook his head. “The direction is right. I’d like to take a look around.”

“Shouldn’t we alert the police as soon as possible, Jupiter?”

“Right away,” he agreed with the chauffeur. “But I still need proof of my theory.”

The lift stopped at the third floor and the doors opened silently. “Just get out of here!” Jupiter groaned and jumped out of the cabin as if fearing it might close at the last moment.

“What theory?” Worthington asked.

Jupiter didn’t answer. “Do you have any idea where the director’s office is?”

“I suppose all the offices are at the top floor,” Worthington replied, pointing to the small, locked staircase. “What are you going there for?”

“I’ll explain that to you when I find what I’m looking for,” Jupiter replied mysteriously and stepped over the rope barrier.

“I won’t be able to go with you,” Worthington said, pointing to his leg.

“All right, I’ll be right back!” Jupiter hurried up the stairs and searched the door signs in the upper corridor for the director’s name. Soon he found what he was looking for, but the door was locked. “If Pete were here now and had his lock picks with him, that wouldn’t be a problem,” he muttered. As it is, he had no chance to open the door. Disappointed, he returned to Worthington.

“Nothing?” the chauffeur said curtly.

“We can get out of here,” Jupiter said and walked towards the main staircase.

“I’m afraid I’ll have to take the lift again,” Worthington said.

“Fine. Meet me downstairs. Wild horses couldn’t drag me into the lift.”

The First Investigator showed sporting ambition when he tried to be faster than the lift, but the chauffeur was already waiting for him in the foyer when he jumped down the last steps.

“Bob left us a little gift,” Worthington said, holding up a jingling bunch of keys. “It was right outside the door.”

“Well done, Bob!” Jupiter grinned and took the key in his hand. “I just need to go back upstairs again.”

“Whatever you say.”

He turned to the stairs, remembered the three and a half floors and hesitated. He was tempted to take the lift.

“No,” he admonished himself. “Never again!” He sighed and started the climb. When he reached the director’s office door, he was out of breath. He tried all the keys until he found the right one. In the glow of the ceiling lights it took only seconds for him to find what he had been looking for. He left the room and ran down the staircase.

“Enough for today!” he moaned. “I don’t want to see any more stairs or lifts. Let’s get out of here!”

“Did you find what you were looking for?”

“Yes,” Jupiter replied proudly, holding up Mr Peacock’s personal organizer.

“How do we get out of here now?”

“Through the side entrance,” Jupiter said. “This will set off the alarm, but the police will have to look into what happened here anyway. Only then we shouldn’t be around anymore. We can deliver explanations later. Now, we need to get to Mr Peacock’s house as soon as possible.”

They walked past the Diplodocus to the small door and left the hall. Soon Jupiter had found the right key for the outer door and they stepped outside. “The alarm goes off in thirty seconds,” reminded the First Investigator.

“Until then, we should be leaving in the Rolls-Royce,” Jupiter said. “Please step on the accelerator, as we have to catch up with the others.”

They ran to the car as fast as Worthington’s plastered leg would allow, and jumped in. Just as the chauffeur started the engine, the shrill alarm sirens howled. The car shot across the parking lot into the street.

The journey in the van was silent. If Bob, Pete and Mr Peacock wanted to say something, they were cut off by a sharp order. The museum director in particular tried again and again, but Ernie and Ceewee silenced him by threateningly showing their weapons. The closer they got to his house, the more nervous Mr Peacock became. More and more often he dabbed his forehead. Dog, on the other hand, just stared at him in the dark.

The journey lasted a good twenty minutes. When they reached the lonely house near Beverly Hills, it was already quite quiet. Only a few cars were still driving on the streets. No one was to be seen when the blue van drove into the driveway.

The van door was opened and Alpha waved all the prisoners out.

“Don’t make a sound!” Alpha warned. “Or else it’s gonna pop!”

Silently they got out and walked towards the front door. The house didn’t have a motion detector so it stayed dark. Even if someone had walked past the house at that moment, he

could not have suspected anything, because the unmaintained garden blocked every view of the house from the street.

“Now open the door, Mr Director!” hissed Alpha. “Or are we supposed to stand out here forever?”

Mr Peacock dug in his pockets. “I can’t find my key,” he said nervously. “It’s gone, just gone!”

“Of course it’s gone.” Alpha shifted quickly to Bob. “You got it.”

The detective startled. He rummaged through his pockets, even though he knew full well that he would not find anything. “I don’t have it anymore. Must have lost it when I tripped in the hall.”

Alpha looked at him sharply. “Even if I don’t believe a word you say, it doesn’t make any difference now.”

He reached into his jacket and pulled out a black cylinder—a silencer—which he screwed onto the barrel of the gun. With a targeted shot, which could only be heard as a muffled whistle, he let the wood shatter and pushed the door open. “Where’s the safe?”

“In my study on the first floor, up there,” Mr Peacock replied and pointed up the stairs.

“All right, let’s all have a look at your nice study.”

They went up the stairs and entered a dark room. Mr Peacock turned on the ceiling lights. The study was stuffed with books and files. It was almost too small for eight people. But none of those present intended to stay here longer than necessary.

“I suppose the safe is behind this picture,” Alpha suspected and went to the opposite wall without waiting for an answer.

He took off the picture and behind it was a built-in safe. The number wheel flashed at him. “Open it!” he commanded.

Mr Peacock went to the safe and touched the wheel, but without turning it.

“Come on, now!”

“I... I can’t,” stuttered the museum director.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I don’t remember the combination.”

“If this is your safe,” Alpha growled angrily, “then I guess you’ll know the combination!”

“I can’t remember any numbers!” Peacock defended himself. “The world is full of numbers! The security code in the museum is the only number I could remember after years of using it. But then there are the secret numbers for my accounts, the telephone numbers of my brother, my sister, my niece, my friends and my colleagues, the code for the combination lock of my briefcase, the secret number for telephone banking, my social security number, the—

“Shut up! I don’t care about any of those!” screamed Alpha. “Open the safe!”

“I can’t remember the numbers!” Mr Peacock repeated indignantly. “I already told you that! No normal person can remember these numbers. No one really, no one!”

Alpha leaned on the tabletop and bent forward threateningly. “You would have written the numbers down somewhere, I suppose.”

Mr Peacock swallowed. “Yes.”

“Then get the numbers now!”

“That... I can’t. Impossible,” Mr Peacock stammered.

“And why?” screamed Alpha.

“They are in my personal organizer,” Mr Peacock said. “And that’s... that’s in my office at the museum.”



“You stupid fool!” Alpha screamed. For seconds there was breathless silence.

“That can’t... That can’t—” Alpha whispered and closed his eyes. “My dear Mr. Director. You will now search your birdbrain for this combination if you still want to live in five minutes. Do you understand me?”

“Yeah, sure, but it’s not gonna do much good,” Mr Peacock said. “I don’t open the safe more than once a month. I never bothered to remember the combination. There was no reason at all, you understand, no reason, not the slightest.”

“I heard you!” Alpha interrupted him in a rage-breathing manner.

“We have to go back,” Beth suggested.

“One more time at the museum?” Ernie asked. “You can’t be serious.”

“Can you think of anything better?” Beth asked.

“Then could you bring my shoes back with you?” Pete said and immediately bit his lips.

“Shut up!” hissed Alpha. “Shut up, everybody! We’re not going back.”

“Then what?” Beth asked.

“We’ll take the whole safe with us. All we have to do is to break the wall. Nobody’s pushing us. We still have hours before anyone gets wind of the break-in at the museum. That should be enough to smash the wall to dust.”

“That won’t be necessary,” said a voice from the door.

Everybody was scared and turned around. There Jupiter stood and waved Mr Peacock’s personal organizer with a smile on his face, and said: “I have what you need.”

## 17. 12:00 am—Revelations at Midnight

“Jupe!” Pete shouted in surprise and immediately reaped a kick from Bob.

“Who are you?” Alpha shouted and pointed his gun at the First Investigator. “What are you doing here? You know these two guys?”

“Which question should I answer first?” Jupiter replied calmly, but then took a card out of his pocket and handed it to the leader of the gang. It said:



“What is this?” Alpha gasped nervously for air. “Who are you guys? Who are you in cahoots with? With Dog?”

Jupiter shook his head. “No. With no one. We just happened to get involved in the whole thing. But finally I started to think in the right direction and asked the right questions. It took quite a while. There’s actually a lot more to this whole story than you all know.”

“Stop talking. I don’t know who you are, but right now I don’t care either. Hand over that book!”

“Here you go!” Jupiter held out the organizer. Alpha snatched it and gave it to the director.

“Get the combination numbers now!” he ordered.

Mr Peacock took the personal organizer and started leafing through it.

“It’s not in there anymore,” Jupiter said and immediately Mr Peacock stopped. “I ripped out the page and destroyed it.”

“Excuse me?” Alpha growled.

“Don’t panic, just be cool,” Jupiter said. “I remembered the combination. But I won’t reveal it until you’ve listened to me.”

Alpha rushed towards the First Investigator and grabbed him by the collar. “Listen, fat boy, I’m—”

“I know your favourite game, Alpha,” Jupiter said calmly. “One, two, three, sure. But I’m not falling for that. You’ll have to listen to me first!”

“And what makes you think you know what’s going on?” Alpha quipped, loosening his grip on Jupiter.

“I was in the lift listening to everything that was being said in the security office... Every single word.”

Now he had the undivided attention of all present—Alpha, Beth, Ceewee, Dog, Ernie, Mr Peacock, Bob and Pete all stared at him and waited for what was to come.

Jupiter began his story calmly and told how he had overheard the conversations—but left out mentioning Worthington. “In the lift I had enough time to think about what I heard. And I found out why the precious diamond, the ‘Fire of the Moon’, was replaced, why Dog betrayed you and who’s really behind all this.”

He took a theatrical break and waited until Alpha was about to erupt again. Then he turned his head and looked at the museum director. “You, Mr Peacock!”

All faces turned to the director. “Me?” gasped Mr Peacock. “But, Jupiter! What are you talking about! That’s absurd, completely absurd, crazy!”

“On the contrary. It all makes sense,” the First Investigator continued with his explanation. “You are the mysterious voice that gave our dear friends here the order to steal the Blue Diamond! When I heard that a stranger had all the information about the workings of the security systems and how to interrupt the power supply, I became suspicious for the first time. So it was clear to me that the client had to be someone who knew the Steadman Museum immensely well—most likely an employee who has access to all classified information.”

“I ask you, Jupiter! You think that’s supposed to be me?” Mr Peacock defended himself. “In the past decades, dozens—perhaps hundreds of employees have come and gone! To suspect me of all people is ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous, yes!”

“Up to this point, it was just a mind game,” Jupiter continued. “I didn’t specifically suspect you until you focussed a bit too much on your personal organizer. I can understand why you would go to the museum in the evening to get it. But if you were held captive for hours, in the midst of a burglary, you would have a lot more important things to think about other than your organizer. Then when you left the museum, you were very insistent on going to your office to get it. It sounded to me like you didn’t want to leave any evidence behind at the scene. So when the power came back, I went to your office to check my suspicions. I took your sacred organizer and read it on my way here.”

Mr Peacock turned pale. “You what?”

“I can see in your organizer, Mr Peacock, that you cannot remember dates and numbers—otherwise you would not have recorded the secret meetings with Dog and a day later with Alpha and the others—as well as their phone numbers. That’s why you wanted to take the organizer with you.”

Alpha snatched the book from the director and flipped through it until he had found the appropriate pages. “Indeed! But that doesn’t make any sense!”

“Because Mr Peacock already had the stone? Yes, it does make sense,” Jupiter continued his explanation. “He could never have just stolen the ‘Fire of the Moon’ like that. Sooner or later somebody—perhaps the owner—would have noticed that it was a forgery in the museum. Then they would have investigated it and found out the trick.

“In the case of a professional burglary, however, it would have been clear that someone else had to be behind it. Everyone would have been looking for you, Alpha, not Mr Peacock. You and your people, Alpha, were bait to the police all this time, so nobody suspects the director. You only stole an imitation, but of course the police would never have believed you. And you or Dog would never have gotten money for the glass thing, because the ‘Voice’ alias Mr Peacock would never have appeared at the agreed place of delivery.”

“We would have grabbed him,” growled Alpha, who was convinced with Jupiter’s story by now. “Somehow we would have found out his identity and then gone for his neck.”

“Unlikely,” contradicted the First Investigator. “Because Mr Peacock had insurance against this—this double game with Dog. If everything had gone to plan, Dog would have taken the stone. Then you would have gone after Dog thinking that he had the real stone. And

even if you'd tracked him down, would you have believed him that the stolen stone was a fake? No. Most likely, you would be convinced that he was cheating on you again.

"Meanwhile, the police will be hunting for all of you. In this mess, no one could have traced the burglary back to the director. Finally, everyone would be convinced that the real stone is gone. So the director gets to keep the real thing and the museum would probably have collected money from the insurance company.

"An excellent plan, which failed because you, Alpha, recognized the forgery too soon."

A silence filled the room in which everyone tried to examine and judge Jupiter's presentation. Then Mr Peacock admitted: "I didn't know he knew anything about gems! I really couldn't know that, could I? I thought he was an ordinary burglar, an ordinary thief, not a diamond expert! How was I supposed to know that?"

"So it's true, then," Alpha said and sparkled at the director.

"Now I can't deny it anymore, can I?" Mr Peacock admitted. "No, I can't do that anymore, it's impossible."

Alpha jumped towards Peacock and punched his lights out with a single blow. For a second time that night, Mr Peacock took a nap in the midst of all the excitement.

"I hate violence, but I probably would have done the same if I were you," Jupiter said. "But this little assault charge probably won't extend your sentence significantly. Maybe the judges will even be willing to overlook it."

"What are you saying?" Alpha asked.

"Oh, I forgot to mention that the police will be here any minute," Jupiter announced. "Did you think I was gonna show up here without protection?"

"We have to go, Alpha!" Beth yelled hysterically. "Right now!"

"Not without the loot!" Alpha shouted and stepped towards Juve, pointing his gun to his forehead. "You know the game, fat boy. One, two, three. Tell me the combination!"

"You won't get far with that!" Jupiter replied bravely on the outside.

"The numbers!"

"Right twelve, left twenty-three, right two, left fifty-nine," Jupiter said.

A few seconds later Alpha had opened the safe and the Blue Diamond in his hand—the real 'Fire of the Moon'.

"Get out of here!" Alpha shouted and before The Three Investigators could do anything, the gang had disappeared through the door.

## 18. 12:18 am—A Great Honour

“Jupe!” called Pete. “Why did you tell him the combination?”

“Are you stupid? He had a gun! Besides, the police will be here any minute. Worthington called them from the car phone, they should be here by now! The gang won’t get far.”

“Come on, after them!” Bob rushed out of the study and ran down the stairs. Alpha and his people were already in the van, the engine howled, and then backed out onto the road.

“They’re leaving!” Bob shouted. “We have to do something!”

The van had turned and shot along the driveway and turned left on the street. Then, sirens howled and blue-red lights lit up the night. The Three Investigators could not see the action from the front of the house as their view was blocked by the overgrown plants. The ran down the driveway and suddenly, they heard loud skidding sounds followed by an even louder collision.

When the three reached the street, they saw one police car blocking the van’s way and one more from behind. Then everything went very quickly. Police officers jumped out of the cars, surrounded the vehicle and forced Alpha and his gang to get out.

In the neighbouring houses the lights went on and curious people stepped on the street. But suddenly a voice screamed so loudly that it even drowned out Alpha’s cursing.

“No! This can’t be happening! The Rolls-Royce!”

“Worthington!” Jupiter shouted. The Three Investigators then ran towards the chauffeur, who was standing in awe in front of the huge dent left in the side by the collision with the van. He had parked the luxury car on the opposite side of the street, but when the van attempted to escape from the police, it skidded and rammed onto the car’s side. Pete stayed with Worthington as Jupiter and Bob went back to the police.

Weapons changed hands and handcuffs clicked. The two quickly explained the situation to the police officers. “There’s another one in the house who shouldn’t get away if he wakes up,” Jupiter said.

Two police officers went towards the house. Then Jupiter and Bob slowly walked back to the Rolls.

“You did great!” Pete said to Worthington.

“Great? The car’s ruined! Something like this has never happened to me before in my long career. How can I ever explain to my boss?”

They had never seen Worthington so upset. “Oh, come on, it’s just a fender bender. You can fix that very quickly,” Pete, who was familiar with cars, assured him.

“My boss, Mr Gelbert is going to kill me!”

“He certainly won’t if my father writes an article about this burglary for the newspaper and praises your part in this case,” Bob reassured him. “Don’t worry!”

Then a policeman came up to them. “So you called us. Now, would you give us a more detailed explanation about this?”

“I’d love to,” Jupiter replied. “Perhaps we should call out parents and guardians first so that they don’t wonder where we are. It’ll be a long story.”

The story was indeed long. The Three Investigators and Worthington explained what had happened that night. At some point, Mr Peacock, in full consciousness, was handcuffed and

taken out of the house.

“Mr Peacock!” Jupiter shouted and ran towards him.

“What’s the matter?” he buzzed angrily. “If you haven’t done enough, you want some more, huh?”

“Well, I’ve had enough,” Pete murmured.

“Right, but there’s one more point we can’t explain.” Jupiter continued. “Why did you want to go back to the museum so badly? You knew you’d run into Alpha and the other guys tonight.”

“I didn’t know that,” Mr Peacock disagreed. “I had told them on the phone not to enter the museum until midnight, not earlier! It was supposed to be midnight, yes, twelve o’clock on the dot, not a second earlier! But these idiots didn’t stick to it and had to strike four hours earlier. So I was forced to pretend I had no idea about any of this. I had no choice.”

“No choice at all,” Jupiter added with a grin.

“Absolutely no choice,” Bob added, “Not even a choice at all, no, never!”

The police cars set themselves in motion to bring the arrested criminals to the police station.

“All right, boys,” said one of the officers. “You come to the station tomorrow morning and put the whole story on record, understand? And you too, please, Mr Worthington.”

“Of course,” Worthington said.

A little later it was quiet again on the street. Exhausted, the three of them climbed into the dented Rolls-Royce.

“And all we wanted was to go to the movies,” Pete groaned as they drove back to Rocky Beach.

“Don’t complain,” Bob said. “The movie was certainly not more exciting than this evening.”

“No doubt about it,” Pete remarked.

“And it was an honour for me to experience a case of my three favourite passengers at first hand,” added Worthington, who had found his good mood again in the meantime. “A great honour.”

“A really great honour!” Bob added. “Absolutely an honour, yes!”